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FEATURE DETECTIVE STORY

The DARK CURTAIN

by M. M. Oblinger

# Mystery Magazine

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# "The DARK CURTAIN"

by M. M. Oblinger

## CHAPTER ONE

WINDOM sat bolt upright, one tense hand clutching the side of his bed. With the other he was rubbing his eyes as if to tear away the last remnant of sleep that enveloped him. Then he leaned forward, the sheets billowing around him, and listened. He listened so intently that he could hear his own watch ticking. He could hear also the faint rustling of the leaves outside and the trickling of water in the bathroom.

That was all; yet some other sound than these had awakened him. Suddenly he heard it again, the loud, clear jangle of the telephone bell, accentuated by the deep silence of the room. He sprang out of bed and groped his way forward, trembling. Still trembling, he took down the receiver and clapped it to his ear.

"Hello!" he said huskily.

"Mr. Windom, this is Betty. For God's sake come out here!"

"What's wrong?" he quavered.

There was no answer.

"What's wrong?" he demanded.

"Party's hung up," Central informed him.

Windom sprang into action. He whisked on the light; he tore into his clothes; he phoned for a taxi, cursing himself for his slowness. He seized his hat and overcoat, clattered down the hall and went out of the front door. He had only a moment to wait.

"Point Gray," he told the driver tersely. "You can drive like lightning."

The driver nodded and switched on the power. The wind rushed past them; they turned the corner on two wheels. The car lurched wildly and threw Windom over against the opposite door. The roar of the motor rang in his ears. City streets reeled out behind them. Almost before he realized it they were before Betty's house.

"You're a trump," declared Windom, jumping out and giving the driver a crisp ten-dollar bill. "You might wait here for a short time. I'll let you know."

Running up the walk, he rang the bell and pounded at the door. The stillness and gloom of the place frightened him. There was not even a light in the house and there ensued no response to his imperious summons.

He had just turned to make his way around to the back when a key scraped in the lock and the door opened. Even in the dark he knew it was Betty.

"What has happened?" he gasped, pushing his way in.

"Hush!" said Betty. "Please hush! You must be very quiet."

She tiptoed her way through the pitchy

blackness which encompassed them and almost immediately the glare of light blinded him.

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

The sight before him had evoked the cry, the sight of a room possessing a quality of weirdness in its disorder—overturned chairs, tables pushed to one side, broken glass, crumpled picture-frames—and Betty herself pale, agitated and worn. With a bound he was at her side, his arms around her.

"Betty," he whispered, "who did this?"

"My father did it." Her tone implied a hopeless but patient suffering. Then, wearily, she shook herself free from his embrace. "He's had another one of his spells," she informed him, speaking rapidly. "Mother became hysterical and that only made matters worse. I—I tried to reason with him," she whispered, "and for a time he was terribly violent and broke and tore things down. I was afraid that the neighbors might hear. When he went out of the house I called to you."

"Is your mother all right?" he asked her.

She nodded her head. "She is suffering from shock, but I think she will be well enough in the morning."

"And your father?" demanded Windom anxiously.

"I don't know. He's gone," whispered Betty.

"I'll bring him back," declared Windom meaningly. "He'll be in jail before morning."

She began to sob.

"No! No!" she cried, clutching his arm, her body shaking. "I called you on account —because I trusted you. Please, Jack—if you love me!"

He bent and kissed her.

"Very well," he said quietly, "but I'll never leave you or your mother alone in this house with him again."

He released her and went outside.

"You can go," he called to the chauffeur.

He re-entered the house and strode over to Betty again, beginning to take off his coat.

"I'm going to get busy and clean up this mess," he said, looking around. "You had better scamper away to bed."

When she had left him he worked steadily for two hours, until a semblance of order came back to the room. It was a dull and monotonous effort, but he stuck to it, glad that there was something that he could do to help these two defenseless women who had suffered from a lunatic's wrath. His rage against Hargrave found its outlet in this way, in the physical exertion that he employed in bringing order to the room. Afterward he sat down to wait for dawn.

At eight o'clock Betty appeared fully dressed.

"What! You up?" he inquired sleepily.

"Yes," she acknowledged almost gaily.

"Oh, Jack, what a miracle you have wrought here!"

"Come over and kiss me," he commanded.

Blushing, she obeyed.

"Now, listen," he said, looking down at her, holding her out at arm's length. "I have seen enough. Never again will I feel a single moment's peace of mind with you living here. Your father—whatever his trouble may be—is a dangerous character."

"What do you mean, Jack?" she questioned.

"I mean that you and I are going to get married today."

"No, Jack, it can't be done."

Windom pulled forward a chair and sat down in it, folding his arms and striking a defiant attitude.

"We are going to be married right away," he said tersely. "I'll get the license this morning and in the afternoon some parson can twist the knot. No flowers, no church, no bridesmaids—a quiet wedding at the home of the bride."

He paused and looked at her, his face set determinedly.

"Now, please don't contradict me. I'm going to have my way this once if I never have it again. Do you understand that?"

Betty signified that she understood by putting her two hands in his and stooping to kiss his forehead.

## CHAPTER TWO

SHORTLY after his marriage Windom had discovered the mystery that had surrounded his father-in-law. Hargrave was addicted to the drug habit—a hopeless incurable, whose only interest lay in satiating his abnormal craving for morphine and cocaine.

Windom pitied and hated Hargrave. The man was endurable only when under the influence of drugs. At such times he was cheerful, benign, philosophical—even brilliant. On all other occasions he was a creature of moods, low and vicious, a half-mad, staring-eyed ruffian.

The problem of Hargrave preyed upon Windom's mind to such an extent that he sometimes wished he had never married at all. Even the advent of his baby Iris had failed to keep Windom's thoughts from brooding over the vexing problem of Hargrave.

He proceeded to his office one morning strangely disturbed. A heavy feeling lay on his chest, a depression difficult to analyze. He went through his morning's mail in the quick but methodical way of most business men, filing important letters, throwing others in the waste-basket.

"This note has been sent to you by special messenger," said one of the clerks, handing him an envelope.

Windom read, curiously at first, then angrily, and finally in an uncontrollable fury bolted to his feet and began pacing to and fro.

"Damn his hide!" he choked. "The devil take a man like that! I won't do it. Never again! I won't touch it!"

The note from Hargrave lay crumpled on the floor, and he picked it up and reread it, his hands trembling:

"DEAR WINDOM: Bring me some more of that stuff tonight. This is imperative. You failed to do it last time. I have already informed Betty.

"CYRIL HARGRAVE."

Grimly Windom caught up his desk telephone and called for his own house number.

"Is that you, Betty?"

"Yes."

"Did your father tell you anything about that note he just sent me?"

"Yes."

"Look here," bellowed Windom, "I'm through as far as your father is concerned. I'm not breaking the law for any one. Do you get that?"

"You're unreasonable."

"You're unreasonable yourself if you think I'm going to keep on degrading myself in this way."

He slammed the receiver on its hook and sat down before his desk, his face red and perspiring. He'd show them! This little game had to stop. No more of this henceforth, if he could prevent it. Old Hargrave could die and rot in his tracks before he'd ever lift a finger to get any more of that damnable drug for the old man.

He could picture Betty's astonishment and the keen hurt that it must have given her. Never before had he refused her anything. He wouldn't refuse her anything now that he could think of, except this one unfair request. He wouldn't budge an inch.

"I'll have a very unpleasant evening," he mused sourly, thinking of his home-coming.

To Windom's great astonishment, Betty met him at the door, her face reflecting an unaccountable good humor. She raised herself on tiptoes to receive his kiss, a happy light in her eyes.

"Baby Iris has been so good today," she informed him. "I really believe the little mischief is planning to walk before her first birthday."

"Iris shows remarkable qualities for a child of her tender age," said Windom, believing it.

Who could have told him that Iris was any different from thousands of other babies in the city.

Later he assisted in putting Iris to bed, remaining behind to pat down the soft coverlet and kiss his little daughter's flower-like face for the last time that night.

When he entered the living-room he started slightly at the sight of Hargrave. The old man turned towards Windom, who perceived at a glance that his father-in-law was possessed of one of those soft and ingratiating moods that came occasionally to brighten the Hargrave home.

"Lovely evening," said Hargrave.

Windom grunted and passed on into the library, where he picked up a copy of the *Bulletin*.

He had just thrown the paper to one side when Betty entered the room.

"Aren't you warm in here?" she inquired. "It seems stifling all over the house. I've come to suggest a swim before the air turns cooler. I've laid out your bathing suit—if you care to go. Your 'sneakers' are on the floor beside the bed."

Windom went up and changed. He and Betty had found it a great deal more convenient to don their bathing suits at home than in the stuffy bath-house at the beach. Usually they walked the quarter of a mile to the shore, bareheaded and clad only in their swimming togs and light coats, the latter flapping about their bare legs.

They had their bath and were on their way home.

"I feel rather happy to-night," Windom confided to Betty.

She looked across at him sharply. "How unusual you must feel," she mocked him. "Has anything happened?"

"I was very rude to you today over the phone about your father," he began.

"Yes; I noticed it."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Please don't mention it."

"I'll try to get some of that—that stuff tomorrow."

"Don't put yourself out on father's account," said Betty very coolly.

"Why not?"

"Because I laid in a supply today. I had to do something, as I felt sorry for him. You wouldn't do it, so I"—she trembled—"so I asked Mr. Peterson."

Windom was horrified. "You dared do a thing like that!" he exclaimed, scarcely above a whisper.

"Yes."

"And you're not ashamed of yourself, I suppose?"

"No, I am not ashamed of myself," retorted Betty. "I'm ashamed of you for permitting a woman—your own wife—to humiliate herself like that."

"Look here!" he stormed; "I'm giving you fair warning. Don't you ever attempt a thing like that again. So far as Peterson is concerned, I won't say anything this time; but watch out! It won't be safe for him to come here a second time with his meddling."

"It wouldn't have been necessary for him to come here this time if you'd acted like a gentleman," said Betty evenly.

"Peterson had better be very careful in future," stated Windom savagely, preparing to return home.

---

## CHAPTER THREE

CHARLES PETERSON, president of the Bayside Mercantile Company, had at one time been Windom's keenest rival for Betty's hand. Since their marriage he had often come to the house. Windom did not like the way Peterson looked at Betty. His eyes seemed to follow her wherever she went. His scrutiny was offensive enough to kindle a slow, deep-seated anger somewhere in Windom's mind. He could not help wondering which of two very valuable possessions Peterson desired most to obtain—the mistress of the house or the house itself.

And now this man had ingratiated himself in the good graces of Betty by purchasing a supply of cocaine for her father. For days afterward the thought oppressed Windom. Nothing could have hurt him more. The family skeleton, hid for so long, had come under the inquisitive gaze of a rank outsider.

One evening, in a fit of utter jealousy from thinking of Peterson, Windom put on his hat and coat and went outside. For a moment he gazed somberly about.

"If the marriage relation in general of-

fered no better prospect than this," he reflected.

His bitter ruminations were broken off abruptly by Hargrave, who came ambling across the lawn.

The old man paused in front of him, his gaze shifting uneasily, his hands working nervously with the fringe of his shining alpaca coat.

"Windom," he began, moistening his dry lips, "will you do me a special favor?"

"I don't know," answered Windom coldly. "What is it?"

"I'm not feeling at all well to-night," croaked Hargrave. "Heart's bad; my head aches—you know the headaches I have—they are simply brutal. All upset. Could you——" He paused.

Windom thought he sensed what was coming and steeled himself for a refusal.

"I need to get out. A bit of fresh air, perhaps. I've been thinking of the water all afternoon. Would you be kind enough to row me in a boat out there on the bay? Would you——" Hargrave's voice rose to a querulous pitch.

Windom breathed a sigh of relief. "Certainly," he said, relieved; "I'll do that."

It amused him to denote the eagerness of Hargrave, his very evident appreciation of the courtesy.

A few minutes later they pushed out in a rowboat. Hargrave sat in the stern, his mouth twitching queerly as the boat scraped over the sand. His eyes were dull and protruding, bulging from their sockets like two glass balls.

Windom was fully a half-mile from shore when the voice of Hargrave, deep and impressive, broke over him:

"Stop the boat!"

Windom paused, resting on his oars. He looked at his father-in-law and a sudden spasm of alarm shot through him.

*The man was evidently mad!*

"The water is deep here," said Hargrave, cackling shrilly.

"What do you want?" asked Windom, fascinated by those beady, unearthly eyes.

"You know what I want. No! Don't touch those oars. Sit quietly—I've got a gun!"

He produced it from the loose, bulging pocket of his alpaca coat, laughing again.

"Are you ready to go back now?" asked Windom, trying to humor him.

"Go back? Who's going back? Not you—unless you've got cocaine to give me!"

"I'll look and see," said Windom, fighting for time. "I may have some."

He commenced searching his pockets, quickly at first, then slowly, endeavoring to formulate some plan under the glare of those murderous eyes.

"I think," Windom said, hesitating, "I think—— No; here in my pocket. Yes! I have it! You can thank me, Mr. Hargrave; I——"

He rose and advanced, swaying a little from the rocking of the boat, one hand working mysteriously and convulsively in his pocket. Leaning forward, he suddenly struck the gun from Hargrave's grasp.

The old man seized him with a lightning-quick motion that sent Windom sprawling in the boat's bottom. Partially dazed, he saw Hargrave leap to his feet, his face twisted in a horrible contortion. The madman reached out for one of the oars. Windom kicked out at him desperately with one unhampered leg, the blow scraping past the stooping figure.

In a fury Hargrave sprang at him. The old man's slim hands were like claws of cold steel tearing at his throat. Windom struggled and twisted from side to side; he fought for the breath that wouldn't come; he tore desperately, feverishly, at those steel-like hands gripping his neck.

Two hours later, when Windom recovered consciousness, he was lying in bed in his own room, Betty and Mrs. Hargrave standing with sober faces looking down at him. His neck was bandaged and he felt an excruciating pain in his left arm. With difficulty he turned his head as if looking for some one.

"Where's Hargrave?" he asked weakly.

Betty stooped down, her face close to his.

"You mustn't excite yourself," she said soothingly. "Try and go back to sleep again."

He slept for several hours. When he

woke again Betty appeared at the door.

"Are you strong enough to tell me what happened?" she asked.

He shuddered, thinking of that madman's cackling laugh.

"We were in the boat——" He paused, undecided, looking up at her.

No; he could never tell her what happened.

"Your father became nervous and excitable," he lied deliberately, "and somehow he—I mean we—rocked the boat and it capsized. That's all I remember."

"But you swim so well," she said. "I don't understand exactly how it could have occurred. You were picked up bruised and unconscious—drowning—by Mr. Nells in his gasoline launch. But no one saw father; they couldn't find him anywhere. They'll be using a drag-net in the morning."

"I can't even remember how I got hurt," lied Windom.

Betty bowed her head, covering her face with her hands.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

HARGRAVE'S body was not recovered. The police had failed to locate it. Conjecture ran rife for a time over this latest tragedy, and various theories were advanced and given publicity by the city newspapers. Finally, however, as is usual in such cases, the whole matter was dropped.

Windom breathed relief when the public at length became weary of the mystery.

Then came Ching Lou, a frowzy, stoop-shouldered Chinaman, laundryman by trade, and as unprepossessing as it is possible for a human to be. He had at the eleventh hour unwittingly divulged the fact that he had been witness to a mortal combat between two men in a boat on the day of the tragedy. He had seen it all with his own squinting Oriental eyes. He had seen one man rise and cross over to the stern; he had seen the man in the stern fling his opponent from him; he had watched the struggle that had ensued, a struggle that had ended only when the boat, swaying perilously, had tipped over, spewing forth these two insane white men, who were slaying each other. Ching Lou had seen it all because he had been right there on the beach digging clams.

The story spread. The old mystery sprouted forth anew. At first, limiting its scope to Point Gray, it broke bounds and swept over an entire city. Within two days the police were investigating.

"Where did the other man go?" they inquired of Ching Lou.

"Him no slimme like ship. Fall down quick," said the Chinaman. "He dead."

The inference was that Windom had killed Hargrave. For three or four days he moved under the shadow of suspicion. Hourly he waited for the grim hand of the law to pounce down upon him. Then Pettigrew, a city detective, who was working on the case, made an important discovery—the discovery of opium in Ching Lou's wash-room.

"Pipe dream," declared the Chief of Police, and dismissed the case. The public laughed. The newspapers carried a column or two of choice humor directed at both Ching Lou and the police force.

Windom, breathing freely again for a short space, was plunged suddenly into the last phase of his altogether nerve-racking experience.

He had sent Betty, Iris and Mrs. Hargrave for a week's outing at Bowen Island. He had fully expected to remain behind himself, but succumbing at the end of two days to a fit of depression, caused by his recent trouble, suddenly changed his mind and followed them.

He arrived at the pleasure resort shortly after dusk and started for the cottage. Somewhere among the trees a light flickered. From his right there came reassuringly the sound of a piano tinkling out some new melody. He heard voices far away—indistinct—then, unexpectedly, so close that he could hear plainly even the nicest inflection of the voice. A man spoke.

"It was providential that I met you down here, because, well—I've been worrying about you."

It was Peterson's voice, and his wife's answered it.

"There's nothing to worry about, I'm sure. Why should you take any interest in me?"

"I do take an interest in you, and you know it. It may be only a friendly interest, but that is beside the point. What I have wanted to do, what I really want to do now, is to warn you."

Betty laughed.

"Warn me against what?"

"Your husband."

"My—my husband," faltered Betty. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

Windom could hear Peterson clearing his throat.

"Mrs. Windom—I suppose it is better to call you that—hasn't it ever occurred to you that there was something very queer about that accident in which your father lost his life?"

"I'd rather not talk about it," said Betty.

"But we must talk about it," gently insisted Peterson, clearing his throat again. "Remember, it's for your own good. You may question my motives now, but some day you will see things differently. May I ask you just a few questions?"

"I—I don't know," hesitated Betty. "What are they?"

"For one thing," began Peterson, "can you say truthfully that Windom liked your father?"

"No," trembled Betty, "I can't."

"On the contrary, didn't he hate him? Didn't you have proof on numerous occasions that he hated him?"

"Yes," answered Betty, scarcely above a whisper.

"Doesn't it seem a little unusual that two people, who so heartily disliked each other, should suddenly become, well, chummy, you might say, and go off on a little boating excursion together? Does it seem quite natural under the circumstances? Personally, I don't think so. What do you think? Wasn't there an ulterior motive somewhere? Wasn't it a scheme to get your father out on the water and, to put it bluntly, out of the way?"

He paused.

"I tell you, Betty—I mean Mrs. Windom—that there is something darkly mysterious in this whole affair. I am of the opinion that Ching Lou saw exactly what he said he saw. What reason would that poor Chinaman have in telling an absolute untruth. Chinamen, as a usual thing, are not interfering. They are almost invariably honest. And the opium found by the detective in Ching Lou's wash-room had really no direct bearing on the case. It was merely seized upon by the authorities for hushing it up. You see, they wanted it hushed up. No doubt Windom used his influence and his money to do it."

"I wish," said Betty in stricken tones, "that you had never told me these awful things."

"It's for your own good," Peterson continued. "Can't you see what a viper your husband is? There is no question in my mind. *Windom must have murdered your father.*"

Betty had begun to cry softly. Peterson went on:

"I've looked at this case from every angle. I have endeavored to bring to it a mind unprejudiced and impartial in every way, but I tell you, Mrs. Windom, I can't arrive at any other conclusion. I only wish to Heaven I could."

There followed a long silence, broken only by Betty's quiet sobbing. Windom sat down and buried his face in his hands.

"Do you believe what I have told you?" he heard Peterson inquire.

"I don't know what to believe," said a broken, suffering voice that was Betty's.

Peterson escorted her to the house. In the light of an open doorway Windom perceived Peterson standing, hat in hand, while Betty, head drooping, slowly entered. The door closed and Peterson came down the path towards him. Two feet in front of Windom he stopped.

"I heard everything you said," Windom's voice was deathly calm.

Peterson emitted an exclamation not unlike that of a trapped animal.

"You miserable skunk," said Windom vehemently.

"I suppose you're going to kill me, too," sneered Peterson, finding his voice.

Windom attempted to speak again, but the effort strangled him. It was as if those thin, steel-like claws had him once more in their cruel grip.

"What!" he finally blurted out. "I wouldn't dirty my hands with you—you infamous liar. You lied to her; you lied to her; you lied to her," he kept on repeating. "You put your hellish thoughts in her poor child's mind. If there's a God, He'll strike you down. I wish you'd die tonight," he went on. "You aren't fit to walk in the company of men—you and your leprous tongue."

Windom realized that if he stood there one moment more no power within him could check the impulse to slay. His arms tensed at his sides; his hands quivered. Pulling himself together, he stepped past the cringing form and walked quickly toward the house. He reached out and tried the door. It was locked. He rattled the knob.

"Who's there?" quavered Betty.

"It's I—Windom."

"Please go away," sobbed Betty.

"You open the door before I break it down!" stormed Windom.

A key rattled in the lock. He pushed his way in. Betty confronted him—Betty, who seemed suddenly to have grown years older. Her face was stained with tears, and she looked at him for the first time that he could remember with fear in her eyes.

"I heard everything that he told you," Windom said. "Do you believe what he said?"

Betty did not answer.

"Do you realize what this means?" he asked. "It means the end. He lied to you because he wants you. If you believe what he told you—go to him."

His wife stood as rigid as a frozen figure, an inexpressionable horror in her eyes.

"For God's sake," he pleaded, "answer me?"

Mutely, Betty turned and staggered out of the room.

## CHAPTER FIVE

WINDOM had gone to Vancouver, one great idea uppermost in his mind: to effect a reconciliation with Betty by proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that he had not murdered her father. Henceforth all his attention, all his efforts, would be directed toward this end. He would, if money and human ingenuity counted, find the body of Hargrave; which, he believed, would be a silent testimony of his innocence.

"I'm giving ten thousand dollars as a reward for finding Hargrave, dead or alive," said Windom to the Chief of Police. "In addition to that, I agree to pay all the expenses of the search.

"If you think it advisable," he told certain police officials, "outside persons can be employed to assist in the work. I won't spare any expense."

In less than four days Windom had the satisfaction of witnessing the miracle that had been wrought by his money. Huge drag-nets, drawn by powerful tugboats, began their systematic and gruesome underwater explorations. Speedy steam and gasoline launches scoured the costal waters. Squads of men on foot, following the great arch of the shores north and south of the city, searched the beaches, foot by foot, endeavoring to find some trace of the missing man. Telegrams and placards were sent broadcast over a wide area, on the supposition that Hargrave still lived.

Yet, despite all efforts at secrecy, the undertaking possessed too great a news value to go unheralded. Special reporters were detailed to cover an assignment which offered such thrilling possibilities. In less than a week Windom knew no more about his own private affairs than the rest of the world at large.

Since his return from Bowen Island he had made no attempt to see his wife or Iris, much as he would have liked to. He felt that until he had removed the suspicion that had been inculcated in Betty's mind by Peterson's scurrilous tongue he was in honor bound to keep away from them.

His comfortable fortune began to dwindle under the great pressure put upon it and a chill fear entered his heart. What if his undertaking would fail to accomplish its purpose?

One afternoon he received a telephone call from Paisley, his bank manager, who had become genuinely alarmed.

"Do you realize," he inquired, "what this thing is costing?"

"Yes," answered Windom carelessly.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you'd better do something quickly," blared the inexorable bank manager. "This project is rapidly eating you up financially. My advice is to call it off."

"I can't," faltered Windom, gripping the receiver tightly, "at least, not for a week or two."

Paisley rang off. Windom returned to his work, his face pale and haggard. He was losing out, he realized, and in imminent danger of being swallowed by the very forces he had set in motion.

The more he thought of it, the more precarious appeared his present position.

"I'm through," he declared finally in desperation, leaning his head in his hands. "I've lost out. I haven't a chance."

That evening he remained at his office until late. Night had fallen long before he had emerged to the street.

Deciding to walk all the way to his apartments, Windom set out at a brisk pace. There was something wonderfully exhilarating, he decided, in the cool night air, which was stirred ever so gently by a breeze that was slowly piling up low-lying banks of fog. Now and again pedestrians overtook him and went by without troubling to glance his way, the sound of their footsteps striking clearly upon his ears.

Continuing his course, he became aware at length of a pair of stealthy footfalls as unhurried as his own. There seemed, in truth, to be a sort of unison between them. His steps were duplicated by the steps behind. When he increased his pace, was it imagination or was it a fact that the pace of the person in his wake quickened also? It occurred to him that he was probably being followed purposely. The thought of Peterson glimmered across his mind and he resolved to take every precaution against attack. In an effort to determine whether or not his fears were groundless, he turned suddenly and crossed to the opposite side of the street, thence went back in the same direction he had come.

The ruse brought about the desired information. The person who had been following him hesitated, stopped absolutely still, lit a cigarette from a match-flame cupped in his hands, then turned back also, keeping pace with his quarry, who had now dismissed every other thought except the one of self-preservation.

Windom had gone less than a hundred yards when, to his great consternation, he perceived another person straight ahead of him, a burly figure which stood motionless, evidently awaiting his coming. Some intuitive sense informed him that the man ahead and the man across the street were birds of the same feather, possibly confederates. So sure was he that this was the case that he halted and turned back again, endeavoring to formulate some plan of escape other than the one which had already occurred to him of attempting a dash across lots to safety.

He had gone only a few steps when he perceived that the man on the opposite side had crossed to head him off, while the man behind had commenced a very swift pursuit, with the evident intention of driving him on into the arms of his accomplice. In the emergency Windom was compelled to do some rapid thinking. Waiting until his pursuer was within a few feet of him, he jumped forward, sprinting half-heartedly for several yards, then dropped suddenly to his knees at the exact moment the man behind might have reached out one brawny hand to seize him. Although the impact of the collision was considerable, Windom had the satisfaction of seeing his heavyweight assailant sprawling inertly fully ten feet ahead, his right cheek cut open by the nasty fall, his ugly, misshapen face twisted in paroxysms of pain.

After he had got one good look at the man, Windom rose quickly to his feet,

crossed a strip of lawn bordering the walk, made his way between a tall tenement and a two-story frame building to the alley behind, where, in the intense darkness, he felt confident he could escape any number of highwaymen. He arrived home without further mishap.

When he woke on the following morning, instead of going downtown to the office, as he almost invariably did, he telephoned to the Bromwell Detective Agency for a competent investigator to come to his apartments at once.

The man arrived promptly at eight-thirty. He was tall, thin-faced, pleasant of speech, with a prominent nose and gray eyes—scarcely the type one would expect to find engaged in such an occupation. He vouchsafed the information that his name was Raddison.

"Formerly of the city police force," he added.

Windom shook hands with him.

"I've a little job for you," he began. "I want you to find a big, heavy-set, ugly-faced fellow with a fresh cut on his right cheek. That is about the only description I can give you. This man and a companion followed me last night and would have attacked me had their plans not miscarried. By a trick, I knocked him over, and in falling his right cheek was cut open. I have reason to believe that the motive was not robbery."

"Was this man very large?" asked Raddison.

"Yes, a big man over six feet; powerfully built."

"What did he wear?"

"All I know is that he was roughly dressed," answered Windom. "If I remember rightly, he had a black slouch hat."

"And you say that he had an ugly, repulsive face?"

"Yes."

"Can you think of anything else that might help to identify him?"

"No; I'm afraid not."

"What makes you think that the motive was not robbery?"

"Because I have an enemy who would do almost anything to get me."

"What is his name?"

"I'd rather not tell you just now. However, if you are successful in bringing my assailant up here to this room within twenty-four hours I may have other and more important work for you."

"All right," nodded Raddison, preparing to go. "I think I can find him. It's an easy job compared to some I've had."

Slowly he slouched into the hall, then turned and came back again.

"I want to ask you one more question. Do you think you can identify this fellow if I do find him?"

"Yes; I'm fairly sure of that. I had a good look at him at close range."

Raddison departed, and a moment later Windom went out for his breakfast, during the interval of which he phoned Keating to say that he wouldn't be at the office as usual. Immediately after he had eaten, he walked to the garage where he kept his car, and for several hours drove aimlessly about the city in the hope that he might catch sight of the man whom he had just recently sent Raddison out to find. Certainly four eyes were better than two, and besides he had lots of time on his hands before the detective could report to him.

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## CHAPTER SIX

THAT evening Windom returned to his rooms to thrash out his problems anew. Thoughts of Peterson had aroused a fighting spirit within him, although it had not altered his decision to cease all efforts to find Hargrave's body. He would withdraw to his original position, admitting his defeat, but the fight was not finished. He would make new plans and carry them out.

He was interrupted in his train of thoughts by some one knocking at his door. Annoyed, he strode over and opened it.

"A lady wishes to see you, sir," said the bellboy.

He went down to the women's waiting-room, feeling altogether out of sorts, wondering vaguely who his visitor might be. He had not expected Betty. The sight of

her sitting there, pale and ill at ease, to all appearances a frail, young slip of a girl barely out of her 'teens, affected him strangely. For a moment he stood hesitating, his pulses leaping, the color gone from his cheeks.

"You!" he blurted.

"Jack," trembled Betty, and rose to meet him.

There was a peculiar expression in his wife's eyes, he thought, an expression which he had never previously seen there—a look in which pain and sorrow and discomfiture were intermingled.

"Well?" said Windom coldly.

"I want to talk with you alone somewhere, if you don't mind," said Betty. "I've been thinking we might go for a short walk together. It won't take long what I have to say. I—that is—you——" She stopped, looking up at him.

Scarcely knowing what he did, Windom led the way out of the hotel. For a moment they mingled with the crowd on Granville, then turned into Georgia street, two silent dejected figures, walking slowly, out of step and out of tune with each other—two dejected figures, young in the physical interpretation of the word only; but old, very old, in misery and experience.

"What were you going to say to me?" he inquired, assisting her over a difficult crossing.

"I was going to ask you to come home."

Home! The mere mention of it seemed to warm his shivering body, while a feeling akin to peace stole over him. Then, abruptly, he fought off the impulse, gritting his teeth against this force which was stronger than the will to resist.

"Please don't ask that," he cried, raising his head to meet the sharp sting of the wind.

"I do ask it," murmured Betty. "I want you to come home with me tonight."

It was on the tip of his tongue to upbraid her, but he said instead simply:

"Betty, I can't go home now."

"Yes, you can," stated his wife in a voice pathetic in its deep emotion. "Please, dear, I want you to come home. I've been despicable and wicked and I'm sorry. After what happened, I don't see how you can ever forgive me, and I know that I'm not entitled to your—your forgiveness, but just the same if you must hate me all the rest of your days I want you to come home."

"No," said Windom in a voice of deathly calm.

"It's my fault," declared Betty, "all of it. I can't explain to you how I've felt those nights and nights, lying awake suffering the hurt that I have given you. You'll never understand, and perhaps you'll never believe that I doubted you just for a little while. I must have been mad; but after that my brain cleared, and I hated him for his lies, and I despised and hated myself for believing them for that one awful moment."

Slowly they tramped on through the storm.

"Night after night, with Iris in my arms, I cried myself to sleep. And when I found that you had gone away, I suffered tenfold what I suffered before. You may never love me again, but I want you to believe what I have told you. I want you to believe that I would have come to you before this, but I was ashamed, and I hated myself, and I wasn't brave enough to face you."

"Please don't tell me any more," choked Windom.

"I love you," pleaded Betty, "and baby loves you—and we want you to come home."

"I love you, too," said Windom, fighting himself. "I'd be a cad if I didn't believe what you've just told me. Nevertheless, I can't go home, and, what is more, I won't go home until I have proved my innocence."

Betty drew him into the shadow of an arcade, turning her face up to him.

"Kiss me, Jack, dear," she quavered, "and then we'll both go home—to Iris."

Windom pushed her gently from him.

"Not yet," he whispered, trembling.

Detective Raddison found his man at two o'clock on the following afternoon. The news was telephoned by the detective himself, who announced that he was on his

way to Windom's apartments and expected to arrive there in less than twenty minutes.

"His name is Boyer," informed Raddison, "and he's an old offender."

"Bring him right up," said Windom eagerly.

When the two men put in their appearance a few minutes later Windom knew at once that the heavy, scowling individual in blue denim overalls, who, at a sharp word of command from Raddison, came shuffling into the room, was unmistakably the same person he had bowled over in the encounter of the previous evening. There could be no doubt of that fact. Boyer's right cheek, black and swollen, had been bandaged rather sketchily with absorbent cotton, held in place by strips of adhesive tape. The swelling and infection, the heavy beard-growth and general sinister expression of the man's face, all contributed to an effect which was far from pleasing to the eye. Windom was occupied in looking at Boyer when Raddison spoke again.

"So you know this man?" he said, turning to Windom.

Windom nodded.

"He's one of the two who intercepted me last night."

Boyer shook his head.

"I ain't never seen you before," he blustered, "and I want to know what all this means. I'm a hard-working——"

"Look here," interrupted Raddison, snapping out his words, "you can't pull that stuff with me. I've got your record. You never did an honest day's work in your life."

Boyer subsided in a scowling, mute defiance.

"Why did you follow me last night?" Windom demanded.

No answer.

"Why did you follow him last night?" thundered the detective. "Come on, now; loosen up! I'm not going to waste many words on you."

"I don't need to talk," said the culprit doggedly.

"You'd better," threatened Raddison, "or it's the coop for yours."

"If you'll answer my questions," almost pleaded Windom, "we'll let you go. We're not after you, anyway. We're after the man you work for."

Boyer started.

"If you'll tell the truth," went on Windom, "I'll give you my word we won't lay any charge against you."

"What do you want to know?"

"I want to know what Peterson offered you for trying to grab me last night."

"He didn't offer me nothing," declared Boyer, "an', besides, we wasn't trying to grab you or stick you up."

"What were you trying to do?"

"We was trying to frighten you," explained Boyer. "We was told to do it every time we got a chance so that after a while you'd leave the city."

"That's a pretty story," sniffed Raddison, rising to his feet in disgust. "What in blazes——"

"Wait!" said Windom, putting up his hand in a gesture of impatience. Then to Boyer: "You haven't told me how much money he pays you."

"One hundred dollars a month."

"What do you do for that much money every month?"

"I do honest work," defiantly. "I look after his ranch most of the time—both me and Charley Wheeler."

"You don't call last night's work honest, do you?"

"I didn't know there was anything wrong in it."

"Is Charley Wheeler the man who was with you last night?"

"Yes."

"What does he do?"

"Charley runs errands and helps me about the place. He's a lunger."

"A what?"

"A consumptive. He looks after the old man."

"What old man?"

"Peterson's uncle, who lives on the place with us."

Windom rose and, very much against his will, went over and patted Boyer on the arm.

"See here, Boyer," he declared in a friendly voice, "I don't think very much of the person you work for. I don't like him;

he don't like me. I've never done him any harm, but he's taken every chance he could to get at me."

"I don't like him myself," admitted Boyer, "but since I've tried to go straight I've had to take any honest job I could get, an' one hundred dollars a month ain't to be sneered at in these hard times."

"You're right," agreed Windom. "That's the reason I'd like to help you."

"Do you intend to swear out a warrant for Peterson's arrest?" asked the detective.

"No," answered Windom, "not yet. I have an idea that I may soon get him on a more serious charge than that of intimidation and assault."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because I feel that he is determined to make way with me. I don't think that he'll stop at anything. Of course you are well aware that he has accused me of murdering my wife's father?"

"I've heard something to that effect. Why don't you sue him for slander?"

"Because I can't prove that his accusations are false," replied Windom.

"Have you ever given the police a true account of what actually happened when you and Hargrave were alone on the bay?" inquired Raddison suddenly.

"What makes you ask that question?" asked Windom, startled.

Raddison sat down in a chair, studying Windom covertly. "Because I have always thought that you withheld some very important facts. For example, what made the boat turn over? Your story, describing that particular incident, was somewhat hazy and unconvincing. You said in your evidence that Hargrave rocked the boat and that it tipped over, but you neglected to tell very coherently why he rocked it. I was present at the investigation and I was struck by your apparent attempt to conceal something."

"I had good reasons for concealing what I did," Windom pointed out. "There are times when silence is better than the truth, especially if the truth hurts."

"Who would the truth hurt?"

"That would be telling."

"Perhaps I can help you," laughed the detective. "Anyway, I have a pretty good idea myself of what happened. You see, I made a little private investigation on my own hook. I found out that Hargrave was a drug addict, and knowing drug addicts as I do, it wasn't long before I arrived at a very definite conclusion."

"Please tell me."

Raddison leaned forward in his chair, his lean face and shrewd eyes reflecting the interest he felt. He spoke nervously, rapidly:

"In a moment of rage Hargrave attacked you. A struggle ensued. You were hurt. The boat tipped over. You were saved, but you believed Hargrave was drowned. Naturally you didn't want your wife and mother-in-law to know what a miserable old rascal Hargrave had proved himself to be."

"You're a good guesser," said Windom admiringly.

"Thanks! That's an admission. Has it ever occurred to you that Hargrave was not drowned at all?"

"Yes."

"In that event what do you suppose happened to him?"

"I can't imagine."

"I can," said Raddison. "If he swam ashore, the first thing he would want would be cocaine. He probably craved it, and didn't even take time to go home. He had one thought, one obsession—drugs! He probably made his way downtown. After that it is not so easy to trace him, but I'm almost willing to wager that eventually he made his way along Pender street to the Chinese quarter, knowing that he would be most apt to find there what he was looking for. Subsequently any number of things might have happened—an overdose of cocaine that killed him or a Chinaman who accomplished the same result more speedily with a knife. How's that for a theory?"

"Very good indeed," answered Windom. "I must say I admire your reasoning powers."

"What sort of a looking guy was this Hargrave?" asked Boyer, who had been listening intently to the conversation.

Raddison whirled about, confronting his questioner.

"What do you want to know for? Have you ever seen him?"

"How do I know if you won't tell me what he looks like?"

"Mr. Windom," said the detective in a tone of mock seriousness, "will you please describe your father-in-law's appearance for the benefit of our worthy friend here?"

While Windom was thus engaged Raddison watched Boyer closely.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

"BEFORE we let you go," said the detective to Boyer, "we'd like to have you take us out to Peterson's ranch. We may do a little fishing out there."

Windom was on the verge of asking the detective why he wanted to visit Peterson's ranch, when that worthy checked him with a look.

"How far is it?" asked Raddison.

"About twenty miles; mebbe more," growled the prisoner.

"The farther it is, the more fun we'll have," declared Raddison in great good humor. "I think we'll start now."

"The road is bad," Boyer pointed out gloomily.

"How would you like to spend Sunday in jail?" demanded the detective in a voice that rang ominously. "Another thing, Mr. Boyer, from the moment we leave this room there's going to be trouble if you don't do what I tell you. Try any of your funny work, and I'll fill you so full of bullets you won't be able to carry 'em around."

"I thought you said you was going to turn me loose," growled Boyer.

"We are—all in good season. But first of all, we're about to embark upon a little journey to the woods. We want you to act as guide. If you're a good guide everything will be all right; if you're not," the detective's eyes hardened, "it's your own funeral." Raddison turned to Windom and added: "You'd better bring a gun." He paused to light a cigar. "Now, Boyer, is the road out there impassable, or can we take a car?" he went on.

"We can get through all except the last two miles."

An hour later in Windom's car the three men crossed the ferry to North Vancouver, where Raddison insisted that Boyer act as chauffeur.

"He probably knows every foot of the road," the detective pointed out, "and, besides, he's an excellent driver—one time with the United States Motors, Limited. If he had confined himself to the working parts of an automobile instead of the internal mechanism of a cash register he would probably be there yet."

Boyer said nothing in retaliation, yet his face became almost purple in resentment, his brows contracting, his mouth drawing down in an ugly snarl.

"No double-cross work," warned Raddison as the infuriated driver slid in behind the steering wheel. "Drive carefully, but don't lose any time. With one exception we're all armed to the teeth."

Windom, who had never previously traveled over the trail Boyer took after leaving North Vancouver, thoroughly enjoyed the excursion. Almost magically the miles spun themselves out. Raddison, who slumped in his seat, more interested in his cigar than in the passing scenery, began presently to arouse himself, seeming to realize that their journey must be nearing an end. A moment later Boyer slowed down, pulled in to the side of the road and stopped.

"Got to walk," he announced laconically.

Raddison had half risen to his feet in preparation to alight when Windom reached out and caught his arm.

"There's another car!" he exclaimed, pointing.

Fifty yards ahead, partially concealed by the underbrush, was the car—a powerful, slate-gray racer, which gave every appearance of being abandoned, or at least unoccupied.

"Move up alongside," commanded Raddison to Boyer, who immediately commenced to obey orders. They crawled back in the road again, advancing slowly in the direction of the racer; so slowly, in fact,

that the detective leaned forward in anger and poked his chauffeur with a bony forefinger.

"Gee, man, move!"

Boyer moved. Responding to the violence with which his right foot ground down over the throttle, Windom's car leaped forward with such startling abruptness that the detective was thrown backward amongst the cushions. Windom heard the roar of the cut-out," followed by what sounded like the crack of an exploding tire. Almost instantly Boyer's grip on the wheel relaxed and he slid slowly to the left with his head hanging out over the car door.

With a sharp exclamation Raddison swayed to his feet with the evident intention of leaning forward to seize the steering wheel, but at that moment the car, unable to make the slight turn in the road, went on straight ahead, leaped a three-foot ditch and came to a crashing stop twenty feet farther on.

Dazed and badly bruised, Windom was assisted to his feet by the detective, who had apparently been unhurt. Beside them was Windom's car still in an upright position, but smashed almost beyond recognition, its crumpled radiator wedged tightly against a large spruce tree, which was fully twenty inches in diameter. Boyer's body lay within four feet of the wreck, his puffed and battered face turned toward the spreading canopy of leaves above.

"Quick!" whispered Raddison. "Pull yourself together if you can and follow me. It's Peterson, all right. He's near here somewhere."

"What I can't understand," said Windom, wiping away a streak of blood from his left arm, "is what happened to Boyer."

"Shot!" declared the detective. "Didn't you hear the report of the rifle? Boyer was dead the instant he fell over the seat. Are you strong enough to follow me, or would you rather stay here?"

"I'm all right outside of a few scratches and a bad shaking up," Windom replied. "Exactly what do you intend to do?"

"We're going to find Peterson first of all. He probably potted this man," answered Raddison, "and when we find him we're going to fight him. There's no other course open to us. Peterson won't give up without a struggle."

"The first thing we know, he'll be getting away in that car."

"I've already attended to that. The car's 'fixed.'"

"Where do you think Peterson is?"

"There's a foot-trail," said Raddison, pointing, "about thirty yards off there to the right. Just before our car swung from the road before we crashed, I saw some one running in that direction. I have an idea that this foot-trail leads away to his ranch."

"You're probably right," rejoined Windom, brushing the dust from his sleeve. "Anyway, there's no harm in following it."

Carrying their revolvers in readiness, the two started away at a brisk walk. The foot-trail was a well-beaten path through the woods. It ran around the base of a hill, skirted the side of a deep coulee for perhaps three hundred yards, then turned at right angles and, a short distance further on, crossed a small stream by means of a two-plank bridge that swayed and teetered under the weight of a man.

Thenceforward it proceeded almost in a straight line, emerging at length in a natural clearing, in the center of which stood a long, low, weather-beaten house and barn. Both buildings were constructed from logs, neatly dovetailed at the corners. The roof of each was made of sod.

There was no sign of any person being about the place. It possessed the deep and unusual stillness of a deserted farmstead. There was an eerie and unnatural atmosphere everywhere that provoked the strange illusion of life in hiding.

Windom and Raddison reconnoitered for several minutes before they attempted their approach. Guns in hand, they advanced slowly and cautiously, picking their way through thick and tangled meadow grass, nervously apprehensive lest they become easy targets for Peterson's rifle-fire. Presently Raddison stopped short, his breath coming quickly.

"Look over there," he commanded.

On the west side of the clearing Windom saw the forms of two men. The taller of

the two was half-dragging, half-carrying the other, plainly forcing him against his will to accompany him. And as he watched their slow progress toward the fringe of trees in the distance a brief struggle ensued and, suddenly, the little man tore himself free and commenced running back, closely pursued by his companion.

Under ordinary circumstances the race would not have lasted long, but in exerting himself to still greater effort and hampered somewhat by his rifle, the tall man, who was undoubtedly Peterson, stumbled and fell inopportunely, thereby giving his fleeing adversary the advantage. Across the still air there came almost immediately a muffled report and the little man pitched headlong to the grass in front of him.

Greatly excited, Windom turned to speak to Raddison when, to his astonishment, he discovered that the detective was nowhere in sight.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

WINDOM believed that the person who had subsequently been shot, either accidentally or intentionally, during his attempt at flight, was no other than Charley Wheeler, the "lunger," Boyer's pal and confederate. He attributed Wheeler's resistance to the fact that the consumptive had probably witnessed the slaying of Boyer, and was, as a result, in open rebellion against the man who had committed the crime. Peterson had probably not intended to kill Boyer at all. The bullet which had sped on its death-errand was, he reasoned, meant for himself. The car suddenly lunging ahead, after the detective had prodded Boyer, no doubt had been the means of saving his, Windom's, life. He could be thankful for that, and yet Boyer, poor fellow, had been snuffed out in his stead.

To his other crimes Peterson had now added the killing of Wheeler. The man had not stirred from his place since he had fallen. His recumbent and twisted form constituted a hideous black spot in the gray-green, almost lake-like surface of the meadow. Peterson himself had arisen and was hurtling away as fast as his long legs could carry him.

Aroused to action, Windom raised his revolver and fired twice in rapid succession, then started out at a run in pursuit of the man who for so many months had been his sworn enemy. Whatever happened, he decided, he must keep Peterson within view. He would go on into the hills, into the mountains, into the wilderness itself, enduring every privation and hardship, if only he could bring him back to face the charges awaiting him. Peterson, the immaculate, the smooth and oily champion of a city's progress, the one-time respected and trusted servant of a great financial company—Peterson, of all men, was now a common outlaw, fleeing from justice. In very derision Windom wasted another shot, gleefully observing the puff of dust that rose almost at the man's heels.

Peterson stopped, crawled behind a brush pile and commenced measures of retaliation by firing back at Windom. His bullets came so uncomfortably close that Windom was glad to seek the protection of a small boulder which lay almost in his path. The fire continued intermittently for nearly three minutes, then ceased altogether.

When Windom looked up again Peterson had emerged from his retreat and was coming straight on towards him with raised hand. But—could he believe his eyes—he was coming on in advance of another person, who walked like Raddison and resembled, even at that distance, the shining, chief light of the Bromwell Detective Agency.

"Good old boy!" shouted Windom, aiming his gun at Peterson.

"I've got him nailed," boasted Raddison a few moments later as they approached. "He's perfectly harmless now after killing two men. Won't this make a nice juicy morsel for the newspapers—the biggest story in years? We'll both be popular for a month."

"How did you manage it?" asked Windom breathlessly.

"The credit's all yours, my boy. If you hadn't had the good sense to keep firing at

him while I made that detour and came up from behind; if he hadn't kept pegging away at you from that brush pile, so very interested and happy and absorbed in his work that he didn't have time to look around at me sneaking up like a snake in the grass—well, if all those things hadn't happened, this nice little bloodsucker might have got away."

"Good for you!" approved Windom. "But are you sure Wheeler is dead?"

"Wheeler is alive as far as I know, but Hargrave is certainly dead."

"Hargrave!" gasped Windom. "Hargrave!"

He became suddenly weak, his voice trembling in husky undertones. "My God! Do you mean to tell me that—that—he out there"—pointing with a trembling forefinger—"is Hargrave, my father-in-law?"

"You win," smiled the detective. "Of course it's Hargrave. What do you suppose we came out here for—a visit?"

"I didn't suppose we came out here to find Hargrave," admitted Windom.

"And you never tumbled?"

"What do you mean?"

Raddison put up his hand in a gesture of impatience. "Why, Boyer gave the whole thing away up at your apartments. Plain as the nose on your face. It couldn't have been plainer if he'd written it on a sheet of paper a foot wide in letters eight inches high."

"Hargrave has been here all the time," exulted Windom. "All the time, and I never thought!"

"That's the trouble—you never thought," teased Raddison.

"But how did he get here—I mean, how did Peterson get him here?"

"I can figure that out, too," said Raddison. "Our friend here must have been feeding him dope right along up to the time of the accident in the boat. Hargrave swam ashore and was brought here—and then you were accused of being his murderer. Isn't that right?" he asked, turning to Peterson.

For a moment Peterson did not answer, then across his face there came a look as if light had suddenly flickered there. The harsh, cruel features became soft, almost radiant.

"A man will do almost anything for the woman he loves," he answered, "even to committing murder. One time at Mrs. Windom's request I supplied Hargrave with cocaine; after that he used to come to me. He came to me on the day of the accident and I brought him here."

Windom sat down on the boulder, now spotted with the last bright rays of a westering sun. Off there across the trees was Vancouver, the city he loved, and within the city were a woman and a little child—worth more to him than all the treasures of the earth. He rose at length, breathing the sweet, cool air.

"Come on, Raddison," he said huskily, "let's go home. The dark curtain is lifted."

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## PRISON TRUSTY BURNED

GEORGE DANIELS, a trusty at the state prison at Trenton, N. J., was badly burned and probably blinded by acid thrown in his face by a fellow convict. Daniels is employed as a "runner" in the prison kitchen. Guards discovered rope, files and hack saws hidden there and frustrated a wholesale jail break plot. Daniels has been accused by the other convicts of having "squealed" to the prison officers on the plotters.

Daniels was called to a cell by a prisoner who called him a "stool pigeon" and then hurled a vial full of acid at his head. In the prison hospital physicians said he probably would lose the sight of both eyes. Daniels's condition was such that he could not tell the name of his assailant..

[This story was broadcast by WJZ]

# On Crutches

By JACK BECHDOLT

THE beggar on crutches had established himself in the doorway of an empty building midway of the block. Along the side street employees of the Rex Novelty Company and neighboring factories passed four times a day, and the beggar did very well off their bounty.

He was a young man who had lost both legs at the knees, and sat with the stumps before him, a pair of crutches leaning in the doorway. He removed his hat. His hand clutched a dozen or so leadpencils and a package of gum. The pencils and the gum had been doing duty for years. Paint on the vari-colored pencils had faded to a uniform gray. The pink gum wrappers had turned a dingy gray also, what with weather and dust. Nobody ever thought of taking a piece of gum or a pencil when they dropped a coin in the man's hat. The gum and pencils merely made it possible for him to beg under a peddler's license. Had somebody insisted on the vendor carrying out his part of the bargain it might have killed the man from shock. He had merely to sit there, rolling his eyes pathetically, his head bare to the weather, and money dropped into his hat; for there is no class of people so generous as the small wage-earners.

Mary Malone, the pretty, red-haired cashier of the Rex company, strolled past the doorway on a Saturday noon. Beside her walked Clarence Fay, handsome in his spick-and-span uniform of the metropolitan police force.

Mary had her week's wages in her pocketbook, as had all other employees of the Rex plant. She stopped her companion with a gesture, turned aside, and dropped a silver coin in the beggar's hat, a hat which was always miraculously empty, though a heavy downpour of coins had been flooding it for the past hour.

"For the love of Hannah!" growled Clarence Fay. "Have you no better sense with your money?"

"I beg your pardon," Mary said icily, her chin rising in the air. "Did you say something to me, Mr. Fay?"

"I said ain't you old enough to know better than that?"

"Than what, please?"

Giving your hard-earned dimes to a fraud like him. Why, Mary, anybody can see with half an eye that the man's a fakir. This town's overrun with his kind—nothing but beggars and grafters. Wasn't there one arrested last week, and it came out at the trial that he owns a flat-house in Brooklyn and a fine sedan automobile?"

"Indeed?" Mary said coolly, her chin way up, "and maybe you think, perhaps, you own the dime I dropped in his hat?"

"Aw, Mary!" Clarence protested, turning red, "you know I don't think anything of the kind."

"I didn't know," Mary retorted haughtily. "What with the way you've been monopolizing my time and undertaking to advise me how to run my affairs in general——"

"I never did!"

"What with the way you stand around outside the factory waiting for me to come out, just like you had a mortgage on my soul," Mary went on rapidly.

"Gosh!" Clarence exploded, "what is the harm of my waiting for you this noon? I wanted to see you."

"I've distinctly told you I don't want you

waiting at the door for me as if I was a little fifteen-year-old kid in the packing-room! It makes me look ridiculous! It's cheap; it's common."

"But I had to see you!"

"You know my address, I think."

"Mary," Clarence said earnestly, "I had to see you this noon. I had a very important reason. I—I didn't mean anything by it except I want to help you. You've got to believe that. You've got to listen to me, too!"

Mary kept her chin in the air, pretending a scornful unbelief in this explanation. But she was curious, nevertheless. She had grown up on the same block as Clarence Fay. They went to school together. They had fought together as kids, fought each other and joined forces against outsiders; danced and flirted as they grew older, and graduated to self-support—each to his job. Most of the time Mary thought very seriously of some day marrying Patrolman Clarence Fay, but part of the time the idea seemed ridiculous, and all of the time she kept Clarence guessing.

The young cop seemed to suffer some impediment of speech after his last remark. Mary finally prompted him:

"Well, if you've got something so very important to tell me, tell it now. I've got a date for the afternoon uptown." She paused at the Subway entrance.

Clarence shuffled his feet. He was redder and warmer than the pleasant afternoon warranted. "How about that bird Underwood?" he asked.

"Mr. Underwood!" Mary's chin went up again. There was a hostile glint in her eye.

"Yeah—Mr. Underwood. Say, Mary, are you—are you seeing much of him any more?"

"That," said Mary distinctly, "is none of your business! Good-day, Mr. Fay."

"Aw, hold on! I—say, Mary, honestly I'm not jealous or anything; but I wish you'd promise not to see this guy, or go any place with him! I—well, it's just for your good."

"The very idea!" Mary cried. "The idea! That's positively funny!" She laughed, "Ha, ha," to show how funny it was.

"No, it ain't funny," Clarence argued. He had pushed his uniform cap to the back of his head. His face was warm and moist. He was very much in earnest. "I can't explain it," he pleaded anxiously, "but I want you to be careful. I want you to ditch this bird Underwood."

"Oh, mercy!" Mary tittered. "That's funnier than ever!"

"It's nothing of the sort!" Clarence cried, getting mad now. "I'm in dead earnest! I can't explain it, but I'm telling you for your own good, let Underwood alone."

"And I'm telling you," Mary answered, her cheeks getting red, "that I shan't do anything of the sort. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

Clarence didn't seem to know anything to do but sigh in an exasperated, helpless way, and glare at her.

"Mr. Underwood is a gentleman," Mary went on rapidly. "He's my friend. I like him. I shall see as much of him as I choose."

"Please don't."

"I shall see him whenever he wants to meet me and I happen to feel like it. And I don't take it well of you to come around with hints of scandal and mysterious reasons and—and putting blackmailing ideas into my head. If you know anything against this man, speak out."

"I can't," Clarence mumbled.

"Tell it to him, not me."

"I'm telling you I can't do it."

"Very well, then, if you are afraid to say all this to his face——"

Clarence looked ready to explode.

"If you are afraid," Mary repeated, deliberately, "I suggest that you mind your own business. Now, excuse me, please; I am going to keep a date with Mr. Underwood. We are going on a motor ride, and have dinner up near Tarrytown, if you wish to know."

"Don't do it! Don't do it, Mary!" Clarence burst out hoarsely.

Mary shrugged.

"I certainly will do it. And I suggest you

keep your nose out of my business and go back to your own job."

She whirled and ran down the stairs of the Subway.

Patrolman Clarence Fay groaned. He removed his cap and wiped his moist face and brow. Dejectedly he turned away and plodded back to the precinct station and reported himself to the head of the detective division.

"Chief," Clarence said reluctantly, "I saw Mary Malone. The report is straight about Underwood."

"She's fallen for Handsome Harry, has she?"

"Yes," Clarence groaned. "She's going out with him today."

"You know this girl, I think, Fay?"

"Known her since we were kids," Clarence answered. "I tell you she's absolutely square, on the level and innocent. If she's with Underwood it's because——"

"Never mind now. We'll know why she's with him before the job is over, Fay."

"Yes, sir."

"And keep all this under your hat. Not a hint to the girl."

"Yes, sir." Clarence saluted. His presence being required no more, he went back to other duties very sad and thoughtful.

Marvin Underwood was handsome and ultra smart. Not only was he smart as to clothing and the little details of costume, but in look and conversation. A well-groomed man of perhaps thirty, who knew the right places to dine and to dance, the most amusing plays and, apparently, the most amusing people. He said he was a stock broker, and he appeared to have plenty of leisure.

Mary Malone met this charming escort at a dance and supper restaurant on Broadway, whither Patrolman Clarence Fay had taken her on an innocent little birthday party. A former employee of the Rex company had introduced Underwood, who proceeded in his capable, fascinating way to take up the rest of Mary's evening, to her delight, and to Clarence Fay's disgust.

That was two weeks ago, and Underwood had called on Mary and met her mother, and thoroughly ingratiated himself into their good opinion. When Underwood met her Saturday afternoon he arrived in a handsome car driven by a chauffeur. He said it was his car. There was no reason to doubt it.

The company of such a man was decidedly flattering to Mary Malone. She was not a snob, nor anxious to shine in society she could not afford, but Underwood was obviously handsome and obviously much impressed with her charms and, beside, he made Clarence Fay jealous. Mary, like many a girl, had enough of the devil in her to delight in making a devoted suitor jealous. She went out with Underwood that evening.

Sitting at a table on an open veranda whence they could survey the sweep of the great Hudson, dining in the warm, fragrant air and listening to the dance music from within, Mary was inclined to vote this holiday a hundred per cent. success. They talked of many things, and Underwood seemed to find whatever she said entertaining. Under his sympathetic questioning she gossiped of herself, and her work, and found before she had done that she had pretty well described most of the office force of the Rex company and her own particular duties very minutely.

"Good gracious!" she laughed. "I must have bored you to death with all this office gossip."

"Nothing you can say would bore me," Underwood assured her. "It's delightful to know all about you—the details of everything you do. But you're tired talking; let's dance."

Yes, it was a large, successful evening, and when the handsome car deposited Mary at her door there was just a little thrill of triumph to see that Patrolman Clarence Fay was passing along the street and saw them.

Clarence was out of uniform this evening. He lifted his new straw hat and passed on with a nod and a brief "Hello" to Underwood.

"Jealous!" Mary giggled to herself, and added with contrition, "Poor Clarence; I treated him pretty rough!"

On Friday morning, shortly after 9 o'clock, Mary invariably put on coat and

hat and went to the bank with a check drawn to cash and calling for more than five thousand dollars in bundles of various denominations. This was the weekly payroll of the Rex company. During her two years as cashier she had attended to it in person.

With the currency in an innocent shopping bag she carried for the purpose, Mary left the bank and went directly into the Subway, as was her habit. She was depositing a nickel in the slot gate when a hand reached over her shoulder and forced a nickel in ahead of hers. Mary turned about, startled, to look into the smiling face of Marvin Underwood.

"My gracious," she cried, "you scared me half to death!"

"Your money is no good in this Subway," Underwood smiled in reply. "Not while I'm around." He explained when they had boarded a train: "I have business near your factory this morning. Hoped I would meet you. You don't mind my enjoying your company?"

"I don't if you don't," replied Mary cheerfully.

They discussed the recent little party, and were chatting happily when they came out into the street again. They walked down the long, vacant block toward the Rex factory.

The buildings facing on this street were warehouses. Mostly they presented blank walls, with a few heavily barred doors and windows. Bonded goods were stored within, and sometimes, as this morning, there was not a soul in sight from one end of the block to the other, not a soul except the beggar sitting in his doorway in the middle of the block. As they approached Mary noticed his crutches leaned against the door as usual and saw his straw hat set out on the curb for alms, though the man himself was mostly concealed in the alcove of the door.

Marvin Underwood consciously slowed his pace, but Mary tried to quicken her steps.

"Please don't be in a rush," Underwood pleaded. "It's such a pleasure to see you again."

"But I mustn't loaf! Really, I have a lot of work to do this morning!" Mary was conscious of the currency in her shopping bag and the payroll envelopes waiting for her hand to fill them.

"Yes, but it's so jolly pleasant, Mary—Miss Malone. You don't mind if I call you Mary? We're pretty good friends."

"Of course not!" Mary blushed a little.

Underwood sighed and swung his walking stick. "You know I've been thinking of you every minute since last Saturday, Mary."

"Don't you ever sleep?" Mary smiled.

"I dream about you when I do sleep. Please don't rush on that way! That silly old office work can wait."

Mary shook her head firmly.

"But listen," said her charming escort. "Just give me a moment. There's something I must tell you, Mary."

Underwood stopped in her path, smiling down at her. Mary was obliged to stop to avoid a collision. They stood just before the doorway where the beggar proffered his handful of faded leadpencils and his tray of grimy chewing-gum.

"Really, you must excuse me now," Mary protested. Out of the corner of her eye she saw a closed automobile turn into the street. Suppose it contains Mr. Gruber? she thought. Mr. Gruber was the manager of the Rex company, and would most certainly be annoyed to find his cashier lingering in the street with a man during office hours.

"Just a word," Underwood said earnestly. "I don't mean to annoy you—far from it. I—I respect you very highly, Mary." His voice trembled earnestly. "I never met a woman like you before! Mary, don't you understand me? I am in love with you, my dear; desperately in love."

Mary looked aside to avoid his earnest, eloquent eyes. She chanced to look full into the face of the beggar sitting in the doorway.

A scream began in her throat, and in spite of her effort it passed her lips as a choking cry of surprise.

For a second her eyes met the beggar's eyes, saw him clearly and recognized him. The beggar was now Clarence Fay, the policeman!

For just a second Mary saw this, and in that second Clarence Fay's finger touched his lips in an eloquent warning for her to be still. Then his head was lowered quickly so that, as it hung, chin on chest, only the neatly parted hair was visible.

"Don't be alarmed, Mary dear," Underwood cried, attributing her startled cry to the effect of his declaration. "Why I only mean——"

The closed car slid up to the curb. A man opened its door and exclaimed heartily: "Well, Marvin Underwood!"

Underwood wheeled about. "Jerry Smith!" he exclaimed. "Well, what a surprise." Underwood had his hand on Mary's arm and urged her rapidly to the curb. "You must meet Jerry," he was saying. "Jolliest sort of chap. Miss Malone, may I present——"

Underwood never finished the words.

Instead his arm encircled Mary's shoulders and Mary was thrust headlong through the open door of the car. The thrust Underwood gave the girl sent her stumbling into a dark interior, where strong hands caught her and forced her into a seat.

Simultaneously Underwood leaped through the door and slammed it. The motor of the car was running, and the chauffeur meshed the gears at once.

Mary Malone had not time to scream, and with the door of the limousine closed and its plate-glass windows shut her scream would have availed little.

And as additional argument to silence, a nickeled pistol was pressed against her side from the hand of Marvin Underwood.

"Not a yip out of you!" Underwood exclaimed harshly. He was breathing hard from recent events, and his eyes held a murderous gleam. "Yelp and it's your last breath. Get me?"

Mary nodded. She was close between Underwood and his companion on the rear seat of the car. The limousine had leaped to thirty miles an hour.

Underwood leaned forward to speak into the tube that communicated with the driver. "Not so fast, Ed! Some cop might pick you up for speeding." Then he turned on Mary.

"You won't get hurt if you play the game," he said sternly. "It's that payroll we want. We'll drop you outside of town where you can walk to some car line. But, mind you, be a good girl!"

Mary said nothing. She was dazed by the rapidity of events. The discovery—or hallucination—that she had seen Clarence Fay, the patrolman, sitting in the doorway where the beggar always sat, his legs doubled under him, offering chewing-gum to the public; Underwood's passionate declaration; the discovery of his villainy; the imminent danger in which she stood—these things had left her speechless with their rapid succession.

Underwood's companion had torn open Mary's shopping bag. He lifted the bundles of currency from it with a chuckle. Underwood leaned forward intently, to examine the prize and count the rolls.

Mary Malone glanced back into the oval plate-glass window at the rear of the limousine. They had rounded a corner and were rolling rapidly down a second street equally quiet.

She saw none of that, for into view, directly against the glass, came a man's groping hand. She held her breath.

The fingers clutched at the sash of the window and a head rose cautiously, the face almost against Mary's face, the plate-glass between them. It was the face of Policeman Fay.

Instantaneously Fay's head bobbed out of sight.

But the momentary glimpse she had of him set Mary's heart beating wildly and kindled a blaze of hope in her breast.

Clarence would help her!

She guessed that he had clung to the spare tire in the rear of the car, and her guess was corroborated by a subdued scratching against the frame behind her.

Then it had not been hallucination when she saw the beggar's face in the doorway! It was really Clarence watching over her!

Mary Malone's heart was ready to burst with gratitude and pride in Clarence! A lump came into her throat, and her eyes filled with tears as she muttered a little prayer for his safety and success.

"I make it five thousand, a hundred and ten," said Underwood's companion. Underwood turned on Mary. "Is that correct?"

Mary struggled for voice to answer him. As Underwood spoke her heart had leaped again. The side windows of the car were covered by drawn curtains, but through a crack in these curtains she had caught a movement, something brushing past.

Clarence had crawled from the tire carrier across the fender and was creeping up on the chauffeur.

"Yes," said Mary huskily, "that's the payroll—all of it."

"Good enough——" Underwood broke off with a gasp. The brakes of the limousine were jammed on hard.

"Ed!" Underwood shouted at the speaking tube, "what's the matter?"

His companion sprang from Mary's side and wrenched open the door of the car to peer out. The door was jerked from his grasp.

Clarence Fay loomed enormous in the doorway and Clarence's fist sent the crook driving back into the interior.

The limousine had stopped.

"Step out!" Clarence roared, "one at a time, and with your hands in the air. And do it before I come in and get you!"

As he spoke he swung to the street and stood with pistol leveled on the occupants of the car.

Underwood, first to obey and careful to follow orders, saw at a glance the chauffeur slumped down in the driver's seat, blood running from his head where Clarence had stunned him with a blow.

The second crook came reluctantly at Clarence's urging. Mary Malone came last. Clarence had not a glance to spare for her.

The patrolman faced his prisoners, his back to the limp figure in the driver's seat. The street was deserted.

"Stand still while I have a look for your guns," Clarence growled, feeling over his prisoners' clothing.

Mary Malone saw the limp figure of the chauffeur stir, raise its head, stare about and comprehend affairs. In a flash the huddled little thug had straightened out and a pistol flashed from his pocket, exploding as it came into view.

Mary's scream of "Clarence!" was scarcely a second ahead of the shot, but Clarence had jerked his head in answer to that voice, moved it aside sufficiently to dodge the bullet.

Underwood and his companion struck out out simultaneously, one with a blow that sent Clarence Fay reeling to his knees.

Underwood paused just long enough to snatch up the bag of loot. His companion already had started to run, the chauffeur with him.

And then the street seemed to boil policemen, uniformed men and men in plain clothes, who came tearing around the corner, leaping from a racing touring car regardless of consequences. Speedily the blue-clad net closed in and the fugitives were soon prisoners in handcuffs.

Clarence Fay, his head pillowed on Mary's knee, grinned up into the face of his breathless superior. "You were late, Chief."

"Took the wrong turn following you," the detective chief panted. "Did they do you any harm?"

"Nothing but what a kiss from Mary Malone can sure," Clarence grinned. "Mary, do I get it?"

"Yes," said Mary, half laughing, half crying.

"And you'll have no more to do with Underwood? Ah, of course not; I was only joking, Mary! You see, we had word Handsome Harry was planning this payroll robbery. It's a regular business with him. And he always begins by making the acquaintance of the cashiers and getting their confidence. The Chief had a notion, Mary, that may be you were in on it, and I wasn't allowed to say a word to you about what we knew. All I could do was look out for you the best I could, taking the beggar's place, as we figured they would use that empty block to get the payroll from you."

"Ah, how you *did* look out for me!" Mary cried proudly.

"Then, maybe," Clarence pleaded, "you'll let me look after you the rest of your life—eh, Mary?"

"I will," said Mary Malone.

# *The* Odd Man

By HARVEY DENTON

## CHAPTER ONE

SUDDENLY the lights went out. For a moment dead silence reigned. Then two dim figures appeared, one from a door, the other from a window. The former moved towards the right, apparently unconscious of the latter, creeping cautiously along behind him. As the first figure neared the centre of the room the second raised an arm. A spurt of flame spat through the gloom. The first figure dropped without a sound. The second, gaining the window in a single bound, departed as noiselessly as he had arrived.

Under the strict rules of the management no curtain-calls were allowed after this act, for here began the skilfully sustained mystery and suspense that had earned for "The Ace of Diamonds" its long and prosperous run. So Edward Carter, playing the heavy who had done the shooting, passed around the window-backing and went straight to his dressing-room to change for the second act.

A thoroughly seasoned trouper, Carter never failed to reload his gun the moment he reached his dressing-room, for the omission of this easily forgotten detail has ruined many an important climax. But that night the action was never completed, for when he threw over the cylinder of the Colt side-swing there fell into his outstretched palm, not the customary blanks, but bullets. And one of them he had just fired straight at Nat Wilson, the star.

When the room stopped whirling Carter opened the door and stepped unsteadily out upon the stage. The first-act set had not been struck. Instead of the familiar bustle of grips getting ready the elaborate second-act set, a deathly silence greeted him. Through the open door of the left-hand entrance he beheld a crowd of actors and stage-hands clustered about something lying upon the stage. Faintly through the heavy asbestos came the voice of Arthur Blake, the manager, dismissing the audience.

Then manager and actor came face to face. Blake stared at Carter for a moment as upon something strange and curious whose like he had never seen before.

"Eddie," he said finally, "I've known you for twenty years, and till tonight I thought you were one of the finest men alive. Why couldn't you settle it like a man? Did you have to murder your friend in cold blood? And did you have to ruin the show of a man who's helped you as many times in the past as I have?"

"You mean that Nat is—dead?"

"Yes. What have you got to say?"

Carter shook his head sadly.

"Since you have already brought in your verdict, Arthur, there's no use in my saying anything. You would not believe it."

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## CHAPTER TWO

WHEN the company reported at the theatre the following morning in response to calls sent to their various hotels they were greeted with a welcome surprise. Shortly after midnight, while having supper at a Broadway restaurant, Bradley Shaw and Mark Jones, two actors of lightning-quick study, had been secured by Blake for the parts left open by the tragedy, and "The Ace of Diamonds" was to proceed without a pause.

Could the rest of the cast beheld a meet-

ing in Arthur Blake's apartment on a night two weeks after the shooting of Nat Wilson they would have had their answer to the puzzle.

In a huge wing-chair sat Blake watching the tall, elderly, distinguished-looking figure of John Mace, dean of the American stage, as he tramped ceaselessly up and down the tiny living-room. Several times Blake started to speak, hesitated, then finally blurted out:

"Suppose we're on the wrong road, John? Suppose they don't unearth any new evidence?"

Mace wheeled in his tracks.

"We're not, Arthur; we're not! We can't be! The guilty one *must* be some one who was backstage that night! It wasn't an opening night, so nobody was there but those who belonged there. There's no way in save past the doorman, and I've known Peter Quinn for forty years. If he says he never left the door, he didn't, that's all! Therefore, the murderer is either one of the company or one of the crew. The latter supposition is absurd. That's why, the minute Ed phoned me from the station-house, I went straight to you and insisted on your filling the parts with two clever detectives, and doing it instantly, before the company could break up and scatter all over the country in road shows. You're not ass enough to reconsider the possibility of Ed being the guilty one, I hope?"

"No, no!" disclaimed Blake quickly, his face flushing. "I'm ashamed to think I ever entertained the thought."

The telephone shrilled, and the voice of the night attendant announced Mr. Shaw and Mr. Jones.

For a few moments after their entrance into the living-room the two detectives stood looking at Blake and Mace with odd expressions.

"Well?" said Mace finally, when the silence had become oppressive.

"We know who did it," declared Shaw slowly; "but it won't do the prisoner any good."

"Why not? Who is it?"

"Miss Morton."

"What!"

The exclamation came simultaneously from Mace and Blake. At mention of the leading woman's name the manager leaped to his feet and stood staring at the two detectives. Mace took a step forward and gripped Detective Shaw by the shoulders.

"Explain!" he ordered curtly.

"Nat Wilson and Edward Carter were both in love with Miss Morton," began Shaw.

"Of course! We know that!" interrupted Mace impatiently. "That's the State's case. Don't waste time, man! Get down to tonight!"

"I had to start with that because it bears directly upon what follows. Neither of us suspected Miss Morton at first. To be frank, we didn't suspect any one—except the actor, Carter. We really thought we were just wasting your money—that the police had the guilty party. But, being paid to investigate the company, of course we did so, and last night my trailing of Miss Morton led me to a spiritualist medium's. That gave me an idea.

"After she left I rang the bell, and the minute I was in I flashed my shield. Mediums live in constant terror of the police, and, as I didn't mention the fact that I'm a private operative, it was no trick at all to get this fellow to grant a request I made.

"Miss Morton was due again tonight. I immediately sent for my partner here, and we took turns watching the medium all last night and all today to prevent his tipping off Miss Morton. We stayed in his house and stuck right with him, never letting him out of the house or near a phone.

"When the seance began tonight I was in the cabinet, my partner Jones was in an adjoining room, and a third operative from our agency, one whose face was unknown to Miss Morton, was right beside the medium every second to prevent his putting her wise.

"Before Wilson died I saw a performance of 'The Ace of Diamonds,' and I remembered that deep, heavy voice of his. I must have given a pretty fair imitation of it, for when I said, 'Is Laura here?' Miss Morton gave a scream and jumped to her feet with her hands pressed to her heart.

"When I saw how it affected her, gentlemen, it hurt me terribly to go on, but I had to. I said, "Why did you do it, Laura?"

"Her eyes were glued on the cabinet, where I was covered up with a lot of white gauze, and I could see she was entirely oblivious to her surroundings and the people staring at her.

"I repeated my question. She said, 'Don't you know?' I said, 'No; tell me.' She said, 'Because he told you something about me that killed your love for me.' I said, 'Who told me?' "

The detective paused a moment, as though slightly unnerved by some recollection. The actor and the manager were staring at him in a tense, breathless silence.

"She didn't answer. Before any of us realized what she was about to do she cried: 'I'm coming to you, Nat!' and put her hand to her mouth. When the lights came on she was dead. Cyanide."

As Shaw finished speaking the other detective, Jones, moving over to the telephone, casually took a penknife from his pocket and opened a blade as if to pare his nails. When Mace strode swiftly towards the phone Jones quietly leaned down and cut the green cord, rendering the instrument useless.

"I know I'm exceeding my authority, Mr. Mace," he acknowledged, "but it's the prisoner, Mr. Carter, I'm thinking of. You were going to call up the District Attorney, weren't you?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Do you want Edward Carter to go to the chair?"

"What do you mean?"

"As the case stands, the worst he'll get is life. All they've got against him is the known fact that he and Wilson were suitors for Miss Morton, and the fact that his prop gun fired the shot."

"Isn't that enough?"

"Not for a death sentence. Any clever attorney can prove the biggest possible reasonable doubt. The two men were never heard to quarrel. Carter was never heard to threaten Wilson. No incriminating letters have been found. Wilson and Carter, though both after the same woman, were apparently friends. The bullets *could* have been inserted through a mistake of the property-man's."

"But why hold back such valuable evidence as you've gathered tonight?"

"Because, Mr. Mace, it isn't valuable, and it isn't evidence. It's valuable to you, privately, because it sets at rest forever any possible lingering doubts of your friend's innocence. But, legally, it not only amounts to nothing, but its introduction into the defense would seriously damage the prisoner's case with the court, the jury and the public."

"Why?"

"Because it would look like a very weak attempt to shift the crime to the shoulders of a woman whose lips are sealed by death. The Prosecutor would object instantly, and I think the objection would be sustained. The laws of evidence are very strict."

"Isn't it true?"

"Every word; but truth is a queer article, Mr. Mace. It can damage the innocent more than a lie, sometimes."

"But the witnesses——"

Jones shook his head.

"A frameup, the State would say. We have their names and addresses. If it looks at any time like the chair, of course we'll call them all. But please take our advice, gentlemen; don't use this testimony except as a last resort. Do you honestly think any jury would believe such a tale as that, especially with the accused woman not here to defend herself?"

When Mace at last broke the long silence, his face was very drawn and old and he spoke in a dreary monotone:

"I guess you're right. But, gentlemen, Eddie Carter's father was my dearest friend. Is there nothing we can do? Must we stand helplessly by and see an innocent man sent to a living death? Have you—have you nothing to suggest?"

The two detectives exchanged glances.

"We've been thinking of something," began Shaw hesitatingly.

"Yes?" cried Mace and Blake eagerly.

"Sit at this table, gentlemen, and listen very carefully to what I am about to say. It's the first time in my life I ever did such a thing, and I do it now not for any extra

reward to myself or my partner, but to save a man I am convinced is innocent."

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## CHAPTER THREE

LOOKING up from a letter he had just received in the morning mail, the warden of the Northwestern Penitentiary glanced at a large calendar hanging on the office wall. He removed the big cigar from his lips and emitted a surprised whistle.

"By golly, Hank," he cried, "didn't realize how near it is to Christmas!"

The clerk nodded smilingly.

"Sure is near, Chief. Is that letter about talent? I noticed the name of a vaudeville agency on the envelope."

"Yes; listen: 'Empire State Amusement Company. Vaudeville Acts Furnished for all Occasions. No Act Too Big. No Act Too Small. We Handle Nothing but the Best.' H'm! Sounds good."

"Well, they couldn't hand us anything worse than we got last year."

"Gosh, that's right! Well," he sighed, "beggars can's be choosers. Write 'em a letter accepting their kind offer."

By the time the first act of the Christmas vaudeville bill provided by the Empire State Amusement Company was over the warden's scowl had faded away into a happy, wide-mouthed grin. He gazed about the bill mess-hall at the laughing faces of the convicts, all eagerly intent upon the little stage erected at one end, and sighed contentedly.

Act followed act—music, dancing, juggling, comedy. And then, to top it all off, a blackface magic afterpiece, in which the entire company took part.

There was a brief intermission to permit the performers to black up. Behind the little curtain could be heard the sounds of setting up the "magic cabinet." While the pianist was filling in with some lively jazz the manager of the show came from backstage and, approaching the warden, asked:

"Have you got anybody here who's had any stage experience? The comedy of this stunt depends on using some one from the audience. When we do it in the regular theatres we always have a plant, but for occasions like this it's much funnier to use some one everybody in the audience knows."

The warden hesitated.

"Yes; I've got one man who was an actor; but I don't know—he's an awfully sensitive chap. Very quiet and reserved. I don't know how he'd feel about it. You see, he takes it pretty hard, being here—considers it a terrible disgrace to his profession. He's a gentleman, if ever there was one. I'd hate like the dickens to offend him."

The manager's eyes, following the warden's, rested on a man whose aristocratic features were in sharp contrast to the hardened faces all about him, and about whom clung an air of distinction that not even the ugly prison garb could entirely efface.

The vaudeville manager stepped quickly over to No. 1742 and, bending low, whispered:

"Don't recognize me!" Aloud he said: "Do you mind helping us out? We need one more man for our last act."

For an instant the two men's gazes locked. Then without a word or sign the man in gray rose and followed the manager up on the stage and behind the curtain.

The manager gave the signal to the pianist and the lights went up to disclose a very fat male performer dressed as a piccaninny holding a flower and simpering daintily. This got a good laugh, and then the manager came down and explained the nature of their final offering.

It was the old vanishing stunt made famous by Kellar, Hermann, Thurston and a host of others, but modernized by comedy embellishments. The funny blackface makeups in place of the customary Oriental garb for the attendants who took the cabinet apart and then put it together again lent a touch of novelty that made it seem like a brand-new trick.

The "cabinet" consisted merely of four long drapes of some heavy velvety material fastened to a light framework at the top

and suspended from the ceiling by three of the prison's drop-lines.

When all was in readiness the manager led No. 1742 to the footlights.

"After great urging," he announced, "this gentleman has very kindly consented to vanish from our midst."

This speech provoked a howl of laughter, in the midst of which a voice shouted:

"Why didn't you ask me, mister? I wouldn't need no urgin'!"

Another roar greeted this sally, in which the warden joined heartily.

"So as not to spoil our friend the warden's enjoyment of this last act," continued the manager, "I will state that this 'vanishing' is temporary only."

"Ah!" cried the same voice, "I knowed there was a trick in it somewhere!"

More laughter followed, and then everybody settled down to watch the celebrated deception which seems never to grow old.

No. 1742 was placed in the centre of the stage. The performers, each grasping a portion of the heavy cabinet curtains, raised the tent-like structure and lowered it over him until he was completely concealed from the audience's sight.

Ranging themselves about the stage, the company then gave a burlesque rendition of the long-suffering toreador scene from "Carmen," ending with a terrific crash upon the piano. Throughout the number no one approached the cabinet. Yet, when one of the company cried dramatically, "Behold!" and they all rushed forward and drew up the curtains, there stood, not No. 1742, but the fat performer who had opened the act.

When the applause had subsided the manager stepped forward.

"At the risk of incurring the wrath of my fellow magicians in show business, I am going to give you a little extra treat by letting you in on the secret. Here's how we do it."

Signaling to his company, he had them swing the cabinet around, and disclosed the hitherto unsuspected fact that in the rear drape there was a slit about six feet high, invisible when the heavy folds dropped together.

"When the cabinet was lowered over our now vanished friend the fat gentleman slipped in with him through this slit. You may recall that a great fuss was made about getting the cabinet set right. That was just stalling for time. Inside the cabinet the fat man and our obliging friend were changing clothes, and the latter was being blacked up by the light of a little electric torch. When the song number was over everybody grouped around the cabinet again, and as they did so the fat man slipped out through the slit and joined the others.

"You didn't see him do this, and you don't see him anywhere now, for the simple reason that he isn't really fat—his prop 'stomach' is now adorning the figure of the gentleman who stands before you. Behold!"

With a grand flourish he raised the leg of the grotesque minstrel pants and beneath could be seen the prison gray.

Just then one of the performers whispered something to the manager, who hastily consulted his watch, then held up a hand for silence.

"Forgive me for cutting short your very kind applause. It's much later than I realized, and we have to get back to town for our evening performances. We'll have to go just as we are. All I can say is I hope you enjoyed witnessing our show one-half as much as we enjoyed giving it. Good-by, boys, good luck; God bless you, and I hope we all meet again next Christmas, *but*—with apologies to the warden—not in this theatre!"

Cheers, laughter and applause mingled together as the little company, still in their blackface makeup—for there was no time to wash up—bundled the cabinet under their arms in a long roll and hastened through the corridor and out to the gate. The count-up finished, the company hurried to their automobiles, and the gate was just swinging shut again when a belated performer came panting up.

"Couldn't find my music!" he breathed heavily. "Hold on, boys, don't leave Little Eva flat."

The warden, busily waving farewell, turned at sound of the newcomer's voice. Before him stood the "fat man."

"Come, come! That's not nice, 1742!

Don't spoil a dandy evening like this by such a silly stunt!"

"What are you talking about?" demanded the blackface man.

"Now, now!" rejoined the warden patiently, "be a good boy and go back. There'll be no crush-out tonight."

"Man!" cried the other excitedly, "you'll make me late for my show! What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

The warden stared with a puzzled frown.

"Are you really one of the actors?"

"Certainly."

"But your manager said you weren't really fat, and——"

"Good Lord, man! You don't think he'd actually give that trick away, do you? That 'explanation' is just part of the stunt. Here, look!"

He pulled open his costume, revealing a corporation that was quite evidently not faked. Suddenly he let out a frantic yell. The three automobiles with their comical-looking passengers snorted into sudden motion and vanished into the night.

"I'm darn sorry," apologized the warden. "I'll phone to the village for a fast car at my own expense, and——"

The guard who had locked the gates, and who till now had been amusedly watching what he supposed to be a very crude attempt at escape, snapped abruptly into excited action.

"I'd better sound the siren, Chief!"

The warden whirled.

"What!"

"The count-out was O. K.—just even. That's an odd man you've got there. It ain't 1742, so he must have crushed out with the actors!"

The warden's good-natured face turned purple.

"Bring him in!" he ordered curtly, and raced madly to his office.

When warning had been sent to the police of all neighboring towns, the siren had been started moaning its sinister cry into the night air, and the powerful flashlights had been set to piercing the gloom about the prison grounds on the slender chance that the escaper had left the automobile and doubled back to confuse the trail, the warden glared over at the fat performer, who sat in a chair across the office.

"I suppose you know the penalty of helping a prisoner to escape?"

"I don't know, and I don't care a damn! I was hired to come up here and do my act. I don't know anything about your prisoner escaping. If you can't keep track of your inmates that's not my fault. All I know is that if I miss tonight's show I'll be cancelled and you'll owe me a week's salary."

"Are you with the Empire State Amusement Company?"

"Never heard of them."

"Who hired you to come up here?"

"The man who had charge tonight—fellow named Brown."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. He got me through my regular agent, Joe Streeter. Met me at Joe's office, explained about the magic afterpiece, which we were all to take part in after our own acts were over, and paid me in advance."

"Who are the other performers? Part of your act?"

"No, no!" retorted the fat man disgustedly. "Don't you know anything about vaudeville? We're all separate acts, working at different houses. We just combined for that afterpiece, like they used to do in the old days of variety. My name's Lester Monahan. I'm at the Crescent this week—unless I get shut out through this damnfool stunt of yours. For heaven's sake use your head, man! Call up the Crescent; ask for Mr. Miller, the manager, and let's get this darn thing straightened out."

With an angry jerk the warden picked up the phone.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

"CLEVER act," remarked a man to his companion, as La Belle Dazie took her tenth bow at the King Vaudeville Theatre.

"Cleverer than you think," retorted the second man.

They rose and drifted out, pausing in the

lobby to light cigars before strolling down the street.

"What did you mean, Blake, when you said she was 'cleverer than you think'?"

Arthur Blake removed the cigar from his lips and favored his tall friend with a quizzical smile. He lowered his voice to a barely audible murmur.

"Le Belle Dazie is Eddie Carter, the escaped prisoner," he announced abruptly.

John Mace's cigar slid from his wide-open mouth and fell unheeded to the pavement.

"Keep walking, John!" cautioned Blake quickly, "and compose your face! We're probably being shadowed this very minute—the police always keep track of an escaped convict's friends."

"It's too dangerous!" muttered Mace as they resumed their walk. "You should have gotten him out of the country at once."

"Impossible! Worst move that could be made. That's the first thing the police look for. Every port is covered immediately."

"Whose idea was this?"

"Mine. After Detective Shaw outlined the method of escape that night in your flat I got to thinking about how difficult it is for an escaped convict to avoid recapture—especially an actor, whose friends are all in public life. Suddenly I remembered Eddie's female impersonations at some of the club frolics. That solved the problem. These stunts were known only to club members. Eddie was sort of ashamed of them, and never would do them at the public frolics. So he wasn't associated by the public with female impersonation at all—nobody but club members ever dreamed he had this peculiar form of ability.

"I arranged booking for him through an old friend of mine, Frank Wheeler, up in the big office. In the automobile that night—it was a big, roomly limousine—Eddie washed off the cork, made up the way you saw him tonight, got into a female costume, street cloak and all, and changed from the limousine to another car that was waiting for him just beyond Round Point. From there he was driven straight to King's Music Hall, and while the police were out scouring the roads for him he was on the stage of that theatre doing his act before an audience of two thousand people."

"But on the street——"

"Oh, he keeps the character entirely—dresses as a woman all the time. Before the police suspect he'll be safely abroad. I've got him booked, through Wheeler, for a long continental tour beginning next month. It's a strange life for the boy to lead, but it's better than rotting in a cell. I kept this from you till tonight purposely, John. I wanted to see if you'd tumble when you saw him. Now I know he's safe—if he can fool you the police will never get wise. No performer will ever get a chance to betray him—even if a performer would do such a contemptible thing—because, through Wheeler's influence Eddie's booked as a headline act, and that means always a dressing-room to himself."

"Monahan was a trump to play the goat. Did he convince the authorities he knew nothing of the plot?"

"Absolutely. All the performers and their personal agents were absolved. Of course they found that the Empire Amusement Company doesn't exist. But Detective Shaw isn't known in theatrical circles, and he's never been connected with it. He was 'Brown,' the manager."

"But I don't see how the cabinet stunt was worked, Arthur. What was the idea of deliberately giving away the trick?"

"Why, don't you understand, John? That was absolutely necessary to avert the warden's suspicions till Eddie was out. The explanation was only partly true. Monahan did black Eddie up while they were both inside the cabinet, but he didn't change clothes with him. In a large pocket inside one of the drapes was a minstrel suit exactly like all the others except Monahan's; also a wig. Blackface is the most confusing of all makeups, for all of my years in the business I've seen minstrel shows in which were old friends of mine whom I didn't recognize till they washed up.

"When the performers grouped around the cabinet, after the song, Eddie, looking like all the rest, slipped through the slit, and it was really Monahan who stood there when they pulled the curtains away. Hi

street trousers, under the costume, were a gray, made to order to resemble Eddie's prison clothes. His 'prop stomach,' of course, was his own. But the warden thought this was Eddie and, since the costume was so differtnt from the other performers, the warden never suspected any attempt to confuse him. That detail of Shaw's about having to leave in such a hurry saved the day, though. If the warden had ever stopped to think about their leaving a costume behind them and had ordered Eddie to shed it would have been all up."

"Poor Laura Morton!" sighed the venerable John Mace, whose deep love for his lifelong profession had been profoundly shocked by the triple tragedy. "One man murdered, another a fugitive from justice; a respectable manager breaking the law. And the cause of it all lying in a suicide's grave. What an awful mess a jealous woman can make of things!"

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## IN THE GRIP OF THE POLICE

ROBERT C. CONSIDINE, internationally known crook, former pal of Eddie Guerin and Chicago May Churchill, master swindlers recently confessed in the Pasadena police station to robbing sixteen Crow City homes. Considine is now a down-and-outer and has been "doing residence jobs just for a living," he told the officers.

For twenty-six years Considine practiced in England, France, South Africa and America. During the Wilson administration he was the subject of a diplomatic controversy between the United States and England and was freed from an English prison through the aid of Lady Astor.

For a week Chief Kelley and two detectives have been grilling the prisoner daily. Finally he opened up and spoke freely of his life. During the entire narrative Considine used little slang, and not a word of profanity.

'Several years before the war England had it in for American subjects living over there," Considine said. "I shot Eddie Guerin in the foot when he attempted to disfigure Chicago May with a bottle of acid. She and I were riding in a taxicab at the time. I was sentenced to life imprisonment for attempt to assassinate. I never will forget the words of the judge when he sentenced me. He said:

"'We won't stand for your American methods over here. You are sentenced to spend the rest of your life in Dartmoor Prison.'

"And just because Chicago May was in the taxi they sent her up for fifteen years for conspiracy to murder. She served ten years. Eddie Guerin proved he was a British subject and was freed of everything.

"If it hadn't been for Lady Astor—she came from Virginia, too, just a little way from my home town— I'd probably be in Dartmoor Prison yet. Brainbridge Colby, who was Secretary of State when my case got to attracting attention, did all he could do to get my release after I had spent twelve years in solitary confinement. Then Lady Astor took up the matter. In exactly one week after she started work I was free.

"I guess it was the love of excitement that started me off on the wrong foot. I got in the Boer War in South Africa when I was seventeen years old. I'm only forty-three now, and I've spent sixteen years in prison, part in solitary confinement and part at hard labor.

"I've worked with some pretty good gangs in my time. Chicago May was my sweetheart for a time. We used to work the badger and panel game on some of the biggest men in England and France, then Eddie Guerin, Chicago May and I joined hands and pulled some of those big American Express robberies in Paris."

Considine said he had made and spent several good-sized fortunes. He has used several hundred aliases during that time.

# *The* Mystery of the Seven Seas

By HENRY HOLT

DYSART entered the yacht's saloon with Mendel at his heels. Some jest of Mendel's had set him laughing so that the shock came with greater force.

Face downward on the thick carpet lay Vendeheer, their millionaire host, with the shaft of a knife protruding from his back.

"Good God!" The words came slowly, involuntarily, from Mendel. Dysart took a step forward, utter incredulity on his face. He moved on the tips of his shoes, soundlessly, awed.

"Vendeheer!" he breathed, and stood a moment with a wild hope that it might only be some hideous jest. Then he stooped over the thing that had been Vendeheer. Their host was dead, obviously murdered.

The two men stood shakily, staring at one another. Inevitably their thoughts coincided. There were now only five people on the yacht. Which was the murderer?

Beads of perspiration trickled from Dysart's forehead. As a newspaper man who had been right through the mill before securing control of a great New York daily, he had seen life in more phases than most. But newspaper men regard murder and things like murder largely in an impersonal light. They come in contact with a wealth of drama every day, but to them it is just news.

This was different; so different that Dysart's face turned white in its sternness. Vendeheer had made his millions without scruple or pity, crushing every under dog beneath a remorseless heel. Perhaps, even, viewed from some higher standard, such a fate as this was fitting for him. But that was not the chief burden of these men's thoughts. Of the five left on the yacht, one more should now die. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

"Fetch Polson," Dysart ordered sharply, thankful that they happened to have a doctor on board. "Fetch Myles, too."

Polson was on deck with an open book before him, while Myles yawned in a chair. At the wheel stood the only servant, Li Hong, the cook, who was capable of taking a trick as steersman when every one else felt too lazy.

"Vendeheer has been murdered." Mendel threw the bombshell at his two friends, watching them narrowly. Polson closed his book with a snap, thin lips of a sudden set in a straight line. Myles, whose nerves had been ragged for months, leaped to his feet. His lips began to writhe. He had come about the *Seven Seas* to side-step imaginary trouble, not to drench himself in the real thing.

"Who—who did it?" he begged.

"Come down into the saloon, both of you," urged Mendel.

Polson's examination of the dead man was brief and conclusive. He looked around at his three companions, who waited in queer silence.

"Within the last ten minutes Vendeheer has been stabbed," he said in a peculiar grating voice. "He was seen alive a little more than ten minutes ago."

"Exactly how long has Li Hong been steering?" Mendel asked. The thought back of the words had occurred to more than one of them.

"I gave the wheel over to him at five minutes after ten," said Myles. "It's just eleven now."

"Has any one relieved him, even momentarily?" snapped Dysart keenly. But no one had.

"Can you be positive, Polson, that it—*it* happened not more than ten minutes ago?"

"At the outside. I saw him alive ten minutes before I arrived here," replied the doctor gravely.

"Don't touch the handle of that knife, Polson," said Dysart forcefully. "There are fingerprints on it. The police will deal with that matter when we get to New York."

Tension in the saloon was growing. It was an unbelievable position. They were three days' sail off Sandy Hook, with no vessel within twenty miles. Each of these four was a man of position, and for years all had been friendly with Vendeheer. Friendly, yet hardly a friend in the truest sense. There had always been something about Vendeheer which permitted people to come so near, but no nearer. There had been a certain magnetism in him, certain qualities which drew both men and women. Yet ever, when one seemed to be approaching his inner feelings, it was as though he lowered an intangible barrier. Some, who liked him well, attributed it to a lifelong habit of wary self-protection. Vendeheer, at the age of twelve, had scuttled on to a New York wharf from a Dutch sailing ship in which childhood had been knocked out of him. Afraid of being driven back to that floating hell, he starved for days in a land where none appeared to understand his mother tongue. Finally he was caught stealing a raw potato with which to appease the agony of hunger. Instead of being handed over to the police he was given a job and for two years found he had merely exchanged one hell for another. But at the age of fourteen he broke away and began the battle of self-protection. His little jaw developed more squarely. By the time he was eighteen he was getting a first glimpse of what life might contain. From then onward power developed within him to win. At thirty-two he was an all-important cog in the mechanism of a great shipping concern. At forty he had so bent men to his will that he was in supreme control of that organization. For nine years thereafter business to him had been just a great fascinating game, with acquisitiveness as its mainspring. He had a house on Riverside Drive, a summer place on Long Island and the *Seven Seas* as his plaything. Of the hundreds of men who knew him none quite knew that strong-faced inscrutable being whose thoughts worked like lightning, whose generosity was at times even ludicrous, but whose mind was implacable. There were few things upon which Jan Vendeheer had set his heart and which he had failed to grasp, whatever road he traveled thereto. And perhaps that was why every one sensed about him something that was to be feared.

And this was the man who lay dead, with a knife in his back, at the feet of his former guests.

"There may be somebody else hiding on the yacht," said Polson slowly. "I doubt it, but in the circumstances our first duty to one another is to settle that point conclusively.

Vendeheer was placed in his own bunk, and then they began systematically to search the vessel. Together they looked into every locker and corner of the yacht, but, as Polson had anticipated, without success. Clearly there had only been six men on the *Seven Seas*. Now there were five living, and one of them had killed Vendeheer. There was no question of an accident or suicide.

Back in the saloon they gathered once more amid ominous silence. Myles's nerves were getting out of hand. His lips twitched as he bit on them, and his feet shifted restlessly. Mendel, tall and gaunt, fingered his chin uneasily, his forehead deeply furrowed. Dysart, every instinct trained by newspaper work now quickened, stood surveying the exact spot where there had been tragedy. His dark intelligent eyes swept the saloon as he absorbed every detail about the place. Not a mark or a clue of any sort apparently existed. But for the personal element it was a situation which must inevitably have fascinated him. As though by common consent he had for the moment taken charge. Wrapped in an air of calm professionalism Doctor Polson was watching him quietly.

"There's nothing here now to give us the slightest hint," said the New York editor. "We've got to find one. We've got to find out something. It's no use blinding ourselves to facts; unless Li Hong killed Ven-

deheer, one of us four did. Leave the Chinaman out of it for a few minutes. First each of us must give an account of himself. Who last saw Vendeheer alive?" His eyes were burning in their intensity as he looked around. "I saw him passing on deck," said Polson. Myles became manifestly more agitated.

"Why—why, I too saw him at about half-past ten," he managed. "I'd been to my cabin for a cigar, and—well, he was just going into the saloon."

"Did he speak to you?"

"He asked me how I was, and I said my nerves were pretty punk this morning. That was all. Then I came on deck."

"I think I saw you," agreed Dysart. "I was writing letters. I've been in the writing-room since breakfast."

"*You* could have gone into the saloon from the writing-room, Dysart, without being noticed?"

"Yes," Dysart nodded, appreciating the significance of that point. "Yes; but I didn't. However, that's only my word. We've got to sift out facts. What about you, Mendel?"

"I was doing odd jobs forward," he said. "I never came aft until I walked into the saloon with Dysart."

"And you, Polson?"

"I went onto the deck with a book just before ten o'clock," replied the doctor in level tones. "I never moved out of my chair."

"Were you absorbed in your book all the time? I mean, from your chair you had a clear view of the wheel. Of course if you were reading you might not have noticed."

"I did notice Myles hand the wheel over to Li Hong," said Polson.

"Did you notice anything else that might have any bearing on this business? About Li Hong, I mean?"

"Nothing," the Doctor declared.

"But you were reading?"

"Yes, part of the time."

"Exactly. It is easily possible that for two or three minutes you might have been completely absorbed. That brings us back to Li Hong. We must be just as fair to him as to ourselves. Li Hong, we all know, can move about like lightning when he wishes to. And two minutes—or, say, three—would have been long enough for him to slip down the companion, kill Vendeheer and return to the wheel. I only say he *could* have done it. So far we have no direct evidence whatever. But remember there is hardly any breeze. The yacht isn't making more than about two knots an hour, and even if the wheel were left the yacht would probably hold her course for a minute or two."

"That's only theory," put in Mendel, "but it's sound enough. There's just one other thing. Personally I never had a row with Vendeheer in my life. He wasn't the kind of man exactly that I'd—well, I don't know whether you understand, but I always found it simpler to agree with him than to differ. As far as I can say none of us has had any disagreement with him. Now, I still want to be perfectly just and fair, but Vendeheer was harsh at times with Li Hong. He couldn't altogether help it; that was Vendeheer's way with the under dog, as we all know. There was an incident two days ago that nobody saw except me. I was leaning over the rail amidship. Vendeheer was on the deck in a chair. He told the Chinaman to fetch him something. Apparently Li Hong made a mistake. Anyway, Vendeheer lost his temper, jumped up and kicked Li Hong. Li hurried away. But I saw his eyes. A Chinaman has to feel a whole lot before he shows it, and I couldn't help wondering then if Vendeheer hadn't been rather injudicious."

Dysart passed a hand over his puzzled brow. The thought occurred to him that Mendel was seeking to enmesh the Chinaman. And also Mendel had brought forward little enough evidence to clear himself. In fact, excepting Li Hong, any one of them might have entered the saloon unobserved. It was a warm morning, the yacht had been barely moving, there had been nothing to do save lounge about, and they had all been taking life lazily. Already Dysart could see how a case might be built up against Li Hong. But the bare idea of sending the Chinaman to the electric chair unjustly was peculiarly revolting to

the editor. A fine sense of justice was his most dominant characteristic. Even in his early days as a cub reporter it had helped and hindered him. He had suffered, sometimes greatly, in fighting for this ideal, which strengthened as he matured, until it had become almost a passion.

"Let's go together to Li Hong," he said. "Even a Chinaman may be a degree less inscrutable if he has just killed his enemy."

But they found Li Hong impassive and mild as ever. All he wanted was to be relieved so that he could get on with the next meal. He said he had not left the wheel since he relieved Myles. Whatever his thoughts, they were securely veiled behind those queer slanting eyes as he shuffled back, a human enigma as always, to his galley.

With one hand on a spoke Dysart took out his watch.

"Three minutes," he said, and left the wheel to its own devices.

Like some graceful human thing the *Seven Seas* glided on, canted leisurely round half a point under a puff of wind, then came back to its course unaided. Dysart's watch went into his pocket.

"It *could* be done in a light breeze like this," he said. "And Vendeheer kicked him two days ago. That's all we have to go on —that and possible fingerprints when we reach New York. Polson, I can't see any farther. I'm up against a brick wall. Have you any ideas? This is Tuesday. We shan't pass Sandy Hook until Friday morning. Then I suspect they'll take Li Hong, just because Vendeheer kicked him! We shall have to mention that. Good God! And if Li Hong isn't guilty—I don't say he isn't—but *if* he isn't, he gets it both ways. Come, Polson, bring your professional knowledge to bear on this thing. You're as unmoved about it as that Chinaman. You're too damned calm. You don't seem to realize, man, that it's a matter of life and death to one of us. In another few days every newspaper in America will be full of the story. It isn't as though we were a crowd of nobodies, either. And until the truth comes out each of us, in his own particular world, will be under suspicion. Can't you hear them saying it? 'Polson? Oh, the doctor who was on that yacht with some friends. One of them killed Vendeheer. *I wonder which of them really did it?*' 'Myles? Funny thing how nervous he always looks. I'd give a dollar to know what he's got on his mind.' 'Mendel? Wasn't he one of the gang that killed Vendeheer? He's thinner than ever now. I always fancy I can see something in his face that suggests —well, that mystery never *was* solved, was it?' And 'Dysart? He's a hot-tempered man. They say he never did have a quarrel with Vendeheer. They *say* so. But Vendeheer's dead.'"

Dysart paused and looked from one to the other.

"You see," he went on, addressing Polson. "And the alternative is to bolster up a case against Li Hong and have him electrocuted to save the skin of one of us."

"I see all that," replied Polson, "and I have tried to see a little further into the truth. But I have no doubt the police will be able to probe further than we can. They will depend chiefly on the fingerprints. I have the knife safely locked up."

"That's all right," said Myles, "but suppose you *had* committed the murder. There wouldn't be any of your fingerprints left on the knife by the time it got into the hands of the police, would there? You'd watch that. I hope you won't mind my saying this, Polson, but, darn it, this thing's driving me crazy, and one doesn't know what to think. You and I have been pals for years. Up to today I'd have punched any man on the jaw for saying you could commit murder; but now you're in the cart with the rest of us. I feel pretty nearly as bad about it as if I'd stabbed Vendeheer myself. I'd go batty if when I got home my kids looked at me wonderingly and—oh, I can't bear to think about it."

"The best thing to do now," said the Doctor, "is to get a sworn statement in writing from each of us, giving in detail all we can recollect of our movements between ten and eleven o'clock this morning. Let's begin now while memory is fresh. Put down in black and white everything you observed

that might have the slightest bearing on the subject."

First, Li Hong was told what had happened. Dysart observed that though his expression never altered his fingers trembled slightly. The Chinaman's statement was written down, and each of the others committed to paper his impressions of that fatal hour. Dysart's affidavit was clear and straightforward. Mendel wrote guardedly, mindful of fierce cross-examination that must come in a crowded court. Myles rambled somewhat. The Doctor's statement was brief and left no loophole.

"I wish to God we were back in New York, off this accursed ship," said Myles, as he handed Dysart his paper.

"One of us—one of the five—won't wish that long," replied Dysart thoughtfully.

That day lasted an eternity. Toward noon the wind freshened and the *Seven Seas* began to bowl along, but never for an instant did the five men aboard rise from their depth of depression. They ate their meals in grim silence, occasionally casting puzzled glances at one another. There was a sinister air about the yacht. Some brooding evil hung heavily. It was as though a volcano trembled on the edge of an outburst.

Each man took hours at the wheel as usual, and at night they split into watches. The wind held good, but the stars were obscured by clouds. The yacht cut her way through inky blackness. Four o'clock in the morning came; Myles went below to rouse Dysart and Mendel.

"Your watch, Dysart," he called, poking his head into the editor's cabin. But Dysart's bunk was empty. He called Mendel and then passed warily into the saloon.

"Hello, Dysart!" he shouted in a voice which he barely recognized as his own. His nerves were too near the breaking point to stand suggestive surprises. The saloon was empty, also the writing-room. Myles's teeth were a-chatter when he tumbled up the companionway to the deck.

"God Almighty, Polson!" he stammered. "Where's Dysart?"

"Isn't he in his bunk?" queried the Doctor. "Don't get excited. Be calm, my lad. Be calm."

"Calm be damned!" burst from the shattered Myles. "He isn't down below, and he isn't on deck. This infernal yacht's accursed. He's been murdered, too, I expect."

"Oh, he's somewhere about," the Doctor said reassuringly. "Mendel, you take this wheel and I'll hunt him up."

There was sufficient light on deck now to see at a glance that Dysart was not there. With Myles gibbering at his heels, the Doctor went into every cabin and even looked in the store chambers. Then he went back to the man at the wheel.

"For God's sake, Mendel, what have you done with Dysart?" he asked. *"He's gone!"*

"Gone? I've been fast asleep for hours. I've seen nothing of him. He was reading when I turned in. Gosh, this gives me the creeps! Are you sure he isn't there?"

"Absolutely. I've hunted everywhere."

"It'll be my turn next," Myles declared hoarsely. "I've felt for months that something dreadful was impending, but now I know. I won't be murdered, though. I'll kill myself first. I'll—I'll——"

"Shut up, Myles. Don't act like a demented ass. There's work for men aboard this yacht, not spineless lunatics."

"I'm not a lunatic, Polly. I tell you there's something queer on the boat. I've felt it all along. Something we can't see, but we can feel it."

"Pull yourself together, Myles," Mendel urged. "There's a solution somewhere if we can find it. And we must find it, or else—or else——"

Exactly! Or else the rest of us'll go one by one," came from Myles fearfully, "including Li Hong. I didn't tell you fellows before, but I thought maybe the Chinaman had killed Vendeheer, and I was afraid he might come prowling around last night; so I pinned a bit of black cotton across the outside of his door. It's there just where I put it. He's never left his place all night. And now Dysart's murdered." His face shone white in the sickly light of dawn.

"You two stay here," urged Polson. "I'm going to see if I can make sense of all this."

First he went to a trunk and armed himself with a small automatic which had been used on board sometimes for practice. He loaded the weapon and then grasping it, turned into the alleyway.

"Maybe there's some hiding-place we didn't find before," he muttered. "There won't be by the time I'm through on this occasion."

Polson was less steady, less professionally poised. Events had marched too rapidly, too tragically for him to view them quite in a rational light. Though he had not before believed it possible, it seemed logical enough now to anticipate meeting the murderer in any dark corner. And if the murderer was not on board, *and was not caught,* how would he and the others fare when they reached New York? It was a situation which would need more explaining away than he was capable of at the moment. Infinitely more.

Polson spent two hours prying into every niche in the ship where a man could possibly hide; but his search ended in an absolute blank. He sank almost in a heap on a chair in the writing-room. Then he noticed a sheet of paper lying on the desk. It was scrawled upon crudely, fiercely—an incoherent message:

"I killed it, Polson. Killed it with a hammer. It was asleep. I hit it on the back of the head. And then I remembered! Oh, God, I'm going overboard. You'll understand, Polson. And I might have——"

It was incomplete, the last word trailing off into nothing.

Killed *it?* Killed what? *What?* And if "it" was dead, why had Dysart gone overboard?

The Doctor read the scrawl through three times, his brow deeply furrowed. He got up and paced the writing-room restlessly. walked into the saloon and there stood groping mentally, staring blankly. One electric light was on. Absently he switched on the rest, when his eyes fell on the long lounge seat that ran down two sides of the saloon. In his search he hadn't looked under there. What he sought now, exactly, was vague; but he knew he had to go on searching. Something had to be found to help solve the mystery.

Dropping on one knee, he stooped, and a wordless sound came from his throat. He pulled an object from under the seat—an object small and covered with fur. It was the ship's cat, dead. The back of its head had been crushed in with a hammer. The hammer was there, too, tucked out of sight.

Mendel appeared in the doorway.

"What on earth's that?" he demanded.

Polson pointed to the dead animal, then handed the letter over. Avidly Mendel glanced through it.

"But why? Why? Why?" he cried, perplexed.

"That cat killed Vendeheer's parrot a week ago," Polson explained. "I remember Dysart saying afterward that it was the cat's turn now. He's been overworking for months. Last night his brain kinked and his sense of justice became perverted. He killed the cat, and then remembered he'd killed Vendeheer while in a similar condition. Vendeheer was a brute in some ways. Perhaps it's just as well that—Lord, Mendel, I'm going on deck for some air!"

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## WOULD MAKE CONVICT'S GUARD SERVE SENTENCE

THE guard of a prisoner who escapes from jail will be compelled to serve out the prisoner's term if the motion of William Hines, of Newark, N. J., submitted at a meeting of the Freeholders' Building Committee is adopted by the authorities, and Freeholder Frederick Lindsley explained that a new rule suspends a guard whose prisoner has escaped, the guard being reinstated if he captures the fugitive.

# Bill and the Jinx

By WALTER J. NORTON

BILL ADAMS had followed the crime game all of his life, and he was an artist in the use of explosives.

The many prison terms Bill had served for safe-burglary had meant thousands of weary nights of solitude.

He was an old man now, and he had for most of his life believed in the jinx.

Years and years before Bill had burglarized a safe in a private house and got a good haul. This was during Christmas week, and the newspapers reported that a burglar had stolen the money raised by a fraternal order to give a merry Christmas to an orphanage.

If Bill had known it he wouldn't have touched that money. He himself had been sending money home time and again at Christmas for his widowed sister's children. He had a weakness for children.

Bill felt that this orphan fund wouldn't bring him any luck if he tried to spend it; in fact, his hunch was so strong that he returned every penny of it with a note:

"I'm sendin' the money back and wants to say that I didn't have any idee that it belonged to Sandy Claws. Here's wishin' the kids a mery crismus and beggin' them orfuns' parden fer not lookin' befo' I leeped."

"THE BERGLER."

On the next Christmas eve he made another good "roll." Before New Year's he was caught. He was sent to prison for two years. While serving his "deuce" he became convinced in thinking it over that his selfishness had put the "jinx" on him. Something kept telling him that if he had made the orphans a gift of the proceeds of that last Christmas job he would have had another year of good luck.

Finally his term ended, and since it had been shortened by good behavior Christmas was near again. He wrecked another "box," but donated the spoils—every red cent—to an orphanage.

Then followed another year of extra good luck, and Bill was more convinced than ever that his only possible way of avoiding ill luck was to appease his "jinx" by "pulling" one job each Christmas for the special purpose of making an orphanage a Christmas present. That's why things had run so smoothly this last year, he reasoned, and he argued further with himself:

"I've tested it out now three times and the two times I shot square with the kids I had good luck. The time I didn't I wished a two-spot in Quent. prison on myself."

Now in the cheap lodging-house to which he had come he sat on his bed in the "dollar-a-day" room he had just paid for and sized up his four remaining dollars, which was all he had left of the "gate-money" that had been given at the door of the penitentiary.

He muttered to himself:

"And here I am again, on the bricks, practically broke, and Christmas two weeks away."

Bill had made himself many promises before leaving the "Big House." He was sore on "doing time," and took a mental oath to work his "mitts" to the bone, mucking in the ditch. He'd even wash dishes, which he called "pearl diving," or flunky in the mess hall of some lumber camp, rather than "step out" on the "pete racket" and chance another "run in" with the "bulls" or another "jolt" in "stir."

But there was the problem of squaring matters with his jinx, and this was a real problem to him, for superstition was as deep in his mind as faith in a Christian. He

had to square himself with his jinx or it would be all off—no chance to go straight, and he did want to go straight. He knew that his act of "gyping" the kids had caused the last two "falls," and now he said:

"Just as sure as I'm a foot high, if I don't promote some "jack" to give a merry Christmas to some orphans' home, I'll get in some kind of a "jam."

He figured that if the jinx wasn't appeased it wouldn't make any difference how straight he walked; that it would be just his luck to be in some locality where a recent robbery had been "pulled" and to be picked up by the cops on suspicion.

He reasoned:

"I want to have luck in this new straight and narrow dodge, so I'll pull one last stunt for the orphans."

Bill had quite a little to do in getting ready for the Christmas job. He didn't even have "soup"—that is, nitroglycerine. Nor did he know of any likely "lay" which would be worth while tackling.

He reasoned that as this was to be his only venture in the old game, the simplest way would be best. He didn't want to take one unnecessary chance.

He was an expert in his line. With the proper tools he could have entered any make of vault or safe, but as he was only going to touch off a safe in some private home, he'd not have to "kick in some jig-shop"—which means burglarize some blacksmith shop for hammer, punch or torch to "stem" or burn the so-called "gut-box" of the more modern safe.

He explained to himself:

"I'll just make a fast one by the way of a jamb-shot, and I'll only need 'bonnets,' 'strings' and 'soup'—that is, caps, fuses and nitroglycerine, respectively, though some crooks called the explosive "grease."

Bill boarded an interurban car and rode eight miles out of the city to a rock quarry. Arriving there about dusk, he pried open the door of a "dine shack." This dynamite store-house contained the articles he needed. He took caps, fuses and sticks of dynamite and went from there directly back to the city and to "Mother" Desmond's place of business at the foot of Howard street.

Mother Desmond bought and sold everything—including information. Her place looked to be the ordinary second-hand store one may see along Howard or Filsom streets, but Mother Desmond also had "other fish to fry" than dealing in cast-off articles. She lived in the two rooms in the rear of the store.

She was withered and gray, and a cringing, shuffling woman, with sharp, wary eyes under her wavering lids.

She dealt with pickpockets, safe blowers, shoplifters—all—even to thieving house servants.

She knew Bill Adams of old, and when he entered the store on that December night she met him with a toothless welcoming smile.

"Well, well, Billy boy, you're home again and Mother is glad to see you. First, you wants to shake them prison-made clothes, and then you wants an outfit, mebbe, and some dope on a good job? How've you been, Billy?"

Bill asked to use the stove in the back room. Mother understood, and went back with him. She put a pot of water on to boil, and while Bill tore the paper wrappings from the dynamite sticks and dumped the rest—sawdust and all—into the water, she took the "strings" and started fitting the "bonnets" for him.

"Anything in the line o' privates?" Bill asked.

"Just the thing for you, Billy, just the thing. One o' my friends was paroled in court and was forced to go to work or else to jail. Such bein' the case, he ain't been able to do his stuff, bein' pegged pretty close and ever'thing. But he's a one-parlor mechanic, and we got him in as a butler for some "uptowners" who are king-pins among stiff-necked sassiety handshakers. Seems like the old woman and gals of the fambly are jool simple. This here friend o' mine, as their butler, has a fine chance to do a little tin-earing. Just yestiday he heard 'em chewin' the fat—arguing about if it was wise to leave the joolry in the home libery safe. Seems like they just bought this here "ice" on tick—you know how them big jool-dumps lets out diamonds and such—so

much down and so much a mont'. An' they do leave the loot in the libery pete. The gals wanted the junk near by so they could doll up in it on short notice, an' their not havin' had any burglars to deal with, I guess, is responsible for 'em givin' safe-crackers a respectable tumble or a second thought. The kid butler heard the old guy o' the house crack that the rocks figure somethin' like $17,000."

"Where is this joint?" Bill inquired.

"Out Richmond way," she said.

The water in the pot had boiled about ten minutes. Bill took it off of the stove and poured it into an old pillow-slip. Mother Desmond held a pan for him, and he drained the liquid into this pan, squeezing the sawdust to make sure of not wasting a drop. This done, he let the fluid stand a little while so that the "soup" (which is much heavier than the water) would go to the bottom of the pan. Then he skimmed the water from the top of the grease with a cup, much as one skims cream. When there was nothing left in the pan but the greasy substance, he took another clean cloth and strained it again to make sure that every bit of dirt or substance foreign to the pure nitroglycerine would be removed. He then filled an eight-ounce bottle and had enough explosive to last him for twelve or fifteen jobs.

"Is this joint bugged?" he wanted to know.

"Yes; there's burglar alarms all over the place. All them swell privates is bugged up these days. My kid friend says it's them kind that work by openin' a door, a window or a transom. Then there's a bug in the floor in front of the safe-door under a mat. Course the bugs ain't workin' in the daytime when ever'body's usin' the doors, 'cept mebbe the one in the floor."

"Ah, that's all right. I can beat them bugs any time by removin' a panel from the door, and as for that floor-gong, every pete-man expects that and goes prepared to get around it. Is the safe-door bugged?"

"No. You know they seldom do that in privates. The kid says they're swingin' that pete door open at all hours, night an' day. But I've known you to beat 'em when the safe-door was bugged! Always did wonder how you did that, Billy!"

"By the gopher stunt, Mother, but that's tough work. Have to come up thru' the floor and burn a hole thru' the bottom of the box with a 'cetylene torch. On this job I'll have to take a panel out of a door or remove the glass from a window. I can make it inside of the joint then without swingin' the door open or raisin' any window to set off any of them 'ketch' gongs."

"You won't have to do that, Billy. I'll get the kid butler to plant you in the servant's quarters durin' the day. The whole fambly, 'ceptin' the crippled gran'pa, gads off some place or another ever' afternoon.. All the hired help goes out, too, 'cept the kid, and his job calls for takin' care of the old guy. When the sun is shinin' he takes him to the park in a wheel-chair. I can get you planted in there tomorrow, if it's a nice day, pervidin' you can make a shot in the daytime."

"Any noise out that way—street-cars, trucks or the like?"

"Surest thing you know. It's on Haight street, which is paved with rough cobble-stones. Lots of traffic, and the street-cars pass right by the door."

"Then I can make it by pullin' a fast one. I'll get a dry battery. I don't want to light a fuse and then wait. I want to touch her off when somethin' noisy is passin' by."

"I got the battery," she told him.

The next day, just as Mother Desmond had framed it, Bill was secreted in the servants' quarters of the Richmond residence.

In due time the door opened just a little and some one said:

"All right, partner. I'm off with his nibs now. It's just two o'clock, and I'll be back about three-fifteen."

Bill worked fast. He went first to the laundry-room and took from there an ironing-board. On his way to the library he got two foot-stools. He put the stools before the safe and laid the board across them. By doing this he had a platform on which he could work without danger of treading on the button or wire hidden beneath the carpet before the safe.

Taking some putty from his pocket, he

sealed the cracks around the entire edges of the door—top, bottom and both sides—making the safe air-tight. At the top-center he cupped the putty, making the cup about twice the size of a thimble. Then with a shingle-nail he pierced through the bottom of the cup into the crack of the door. At the bottom crack-center he made another cup and another hole.

Into the top cup he then poured a little over a quarter ounce of liquid explosive. He watched the bottom cup until the fluid showed in it, and knew that in order for it to get to the bottom cup it had to travel around the edges of the door. Then he pressed the bottom cup shut with his thumb, making it air-tight.

He had about seven feet of small copper wire. On one end of the wire he had fitted a cap. The capped end was then placed into the top putty-cup, the little cap at the very hole the 'soup' had entered to trickle down around the door edges. Pressing the 'thimble' cup shut, packing the putty tightly around the wire and thus covering the cap, he was ready for his first shot.

Backing up to the wall at the rear of the safe, he waited for a car or a truck to pass. Soon a trolley came clanging by. He simply touched the dead wire to the live wire in the battery. A dull, muffled report, a clatter as the door landed in the center of the room, and the hardest part of his work was done.

Bill knew he was safe from injury where he stood, because the explosive always works toward the point of least resistance, which is always toward the face of the safe, and never toward the top, bottom or sides of it. And Bill had stood alongside and not in front of the door.

Shooting a safe door is not as noisy as blasting a tree-stump. Safes are usually blown in the downtown districts where the most people are about, and where the police are as thick as bees. The noise isn't even sharp; it's dull, and it is hard for any one on the outside of a building to determine just where the noise comes from. Making the explosive air-tight has to do with making the report sound as though it came from a distance.

But Bill was not done. The second door, which he called the "dust door," was supposed to be opened with a key.

Taking a pinch of cotton, he poured one drop of "soup" on it and, using his knife-blade, stuffed this into the keyhole of the "duster." Then he made use of one of the "strings" and "bonnets" which Mother had fixed for him. Sticking the fuse, cap-end first, into the keyhole against the cotton and putting a little putty around the hole, he lit the three-inch "string." There was only enough explosive used to wreck the mechanism of the lock, so opening the inner door in this way made but little noise.

In small safes there is but one more little compartment—where the valuables are always kept—and Bill called this the "funk." It was made of dark wood, evidently mahogany.

"So far, so good," he muttered.

He stepped quickly to the library window, from where he could see down on the street. About four doors up a mailman stood laughing and talking to a woman. Across the street a child was skipping the rope. He took all of this in with a hurried glance.

"Not a 'rank,' not a 'rumble,' and only one more door, and it a wooden one; and then the 'ice.' Where the devil did I put that jimmy? Damn it, I must not a-brung it!"

Dashing to a table, he seized a paper-knife, but in using it for a pry it bent double.

"Gee—and I ain't got all day!"

Then he saw his jimmy—the bar or chisel was lying where he'd left it in his haste; it was over by the battery. Catching the tool up, his hands shook as he started to pry at the door to break the lock catch.

"If I ain't shakin' like an old woman; But I ain't never wanted anythin' quite as bad as I do them rocks. And this is the last 'caper,' the last 'kinky' move. I'll fix the kids up, and then me for the straight stuff."

So he muttered as he jabbed and pried at the door, his hands trembling with eagerness. And then the lock gave way—the door flew open.

"Now!" he cried aloud, and then: "What? Where the deuce! How's this! *Say!*"

He jammed his hand into the little compartment and ran it around, up and down. Surprise, disappointment, utter astonishment, gripped him. Beads of cold sweat ran off of him. The safe was empty!

Bill's Christmas jinx seemed to be rushing the season.

The butler and his patient had left by a side-door, so Bill knew he could get out that way without turning in an alarm. But as he gathered up his tools and jammed them down into the leather valise Mother had furnished, he felt that it wouldn't make a great deal of difference if the "bulls" did happen along. Bad luck had crossed his path at the start, so what was the use trying, or at least making any further or special effort to dodge the inevitable. However, he shambled along with his head down, cursing his luck and the man who was supposed to have "lamped the point down" for Mother.

"What kind of a fourteen-carat sap is this butler friend of that old Desmond 'broad' to steer a guy up against a bloomer like that one? What good is he, and what is he around for, if he don't even know when the 'jools' ain't to home?" he inquired of himself.

When Bill entered Mother's place to leave the outfit, she could see at once that things hadn't gone right.

"What's the matter, Billy; did you get a hot one from the bulls? You hadn't ought to run in here so quick if the joint was ranked—you know that——"

"Aw, dry up! When did I ever finger a joint in a getaway to any dicks?" he growled at her.

"Then what's wrong? Wasn't it like I said about the bugs?".

"Damn the bugs! Do you think that's all there is to getting swag out of a box—beating bugs? First, there's got to be somethin' in a safe."

"You mean to tell me that the pete was empty—that you didn't get that 'ice'?" she exclaimed.

"You don't see any joy written on my mush from the success I've had, do you? And, furthermore, I arise to remark that that butler friend of yours is either goofy, or else he's trying some dirty double-cross caper. He wants to watch his step, or I'll——"

"Not so fast, Billy; the kid's all right. Mebbe he pulled a bonchead play, but that's all it is. They must have slipped one over on him, 'cause the 'rocks' *was* there last night."

"Fine lot of trouble I've had for nothin'," he growled.

"Wait, now, Billy. There's another good one out in the Filmore district——"

"Then why didn't you send me there first?" he cut in.

"Oh, but the first one looked best, Billy. Now, you take a Filmore car, and——"

"Wait, Mother; give me time to get my noodle straight. I don't want to be running in on all the different lays all over the town. The way things stand with me right now, I ain't throwin' no rocks at the stir house, I'll tell you. I want to think this thing over, and then mebbe I'll show back here tomorrow; that is—well, mebbe."

As he left the store Mother shook her head and muttered:

"Billy's gettin' old. Guess the stir-house has broke his spirit a little, too, but a few hearty feeds and a few drinks, and then mebbe he will swing back into the harness again."

Next day Bill bought a paper and read that the owner of the wrecked safe claimed to have lost $17,000 worth of jewels, but that the gems *were fully covered by insurance.*

This made Bill rave. So that was it? He had played little Santa Claus for a family of four-flushers who had sold off what jewelry they had bought on credit. He had aided in the insurance swindle. The real thieves didn't even know him.

He went straight to Mother Desmond's with blood in his eye.

"Why did you fool me? How much do you pull down on this two-faced, double-cross caper? Don't say you didn't know! You sent me in to blow that two-shot fake, knowin' it was a bloomer!" he shouted at her.

Mother cringed before him, wringing her hands and shaking her head in emphatic denial. Her excitement seemed to choke her speech for a moment, but finally she found enough voice to say:

"Honest, Billy, I didn't know about it. Don't say that I'd double-bank an old-timer for any of them uptowners. You know better, Billy. For them snide four-flushin', high-brow grafters I ain't got no use at all. Besides, they never come down here to me for help. I ain't nice enough to engineer *their* dirty work. It was just a fluke, Billy—*you gotta* believe me!"

"Are they havin' that box fixed?" he asked.

"Yeah, so the kid told me."

"Then if you're so square, send me in again—after they collect the insurance money they stole. Mebbe they won't wear that around their necks."

"Now, that's the talk! That sounds like the old-time Bill Adams that I used to know. And get this, Billy: I happens to know that they ain't goin' to bank that insurance money."

Bill looked at the old woman suspiciously and said:

"Aw, rats! I guess you figure that the same as I do; that they won't expect a crook to touch twice in the same spot, 'specially after ringin' a bloomer on the first prowl."

"Sure, I thought o' that, too, but this is a straight tip. My kid friend has been listenin' in again. He says these would-be refined birds what he's workin' for owes nearly ever'body in town—grocery bills, tailor bills, the plumber and the furniture man, and clean on down the line to the butler. Course these here creditors got a line on this insurance dough that the fambly whipped off. So they all held a confab and agreed among themselves that it was more safe to risk keepin' the dough at home—in spite o' the recent burglary—than to bank it and run chances of havin' a dozen or more creditors swoop down on it with attachments and such."

"Humph! I'll bet a lot of them creditors what's gettin' stung is hardworkin' tradespeople with famblys. And look at the empty cells in stir! 'Tain't right, 'tain't right," muttered Bill.

Once more Bill Adams was planted in the Richmord residence. Once more grandpa was taken for a ride in the park, and once more Bill made a "jamb-shot."

This time the safe was not empty, for when he ripped open the door he found no end of twenties.

Bill did not spend one dime of that haul for himself. It all went to an orphanage—from a friend.

And the Christmas jinx has laid off of Bill. He sought out a welfare friend who had been interested in him in prison, and this friend asked Bill what kind of work he would like to try.

"I ain't perticular. All of your kind o' work is sorta strange to me, but I think mebbe doin' somethin' around a orphan 'sylum would be most likely to interest me."

And the welfare friend said:

"That can be arranged. I know they need a sort of a gardener out at the Claremount Orphanage."

And so it was arranged.

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## RAILROAD DETECTIVE IS FOUND DEAD

THE body of William Miller, 35 years old, a New York Central Railroad detective, was found lying on the grass in Riverside Drive near Ninety-sixth street by Frank Franze, a sailor on the U. S. S. *Florida*, at anchor in the Hudson River.

Although there were no marks of violence, the face and clothing were stained with blood. A revolver which Miller was known to carry was missing from its holster. Nothing else appeared to have been disturbed.

Franze called a policeman, who summoned an ambulance. The doctor said death might have resulted from hemorrhage, but could not be definitely determined without an autopsy. An investigation was begun.

# Born a Crook

By RALPH NORTHROP

## CHAPTER ONE

"CLIFF STEVENS, hesitating a moment, glanced up and down the wide street rapidly to make sure that he was not being observed and then darted into the end of the alley.

It seemed peculiar to Stevens that he should feel something like fear this night while engaged in such an enterprise, and he blamed it on his two years in State's prison and on the fact that a man was cowed there, no matter how great his soul or how indomitable his spirit.

In the distance some clock struck the hour of twelve. Stevens had known that it was very close to midnight, and that was the hour he had selected. He had left his room in the ramshackle lodging-house he called home, slipped from it cautiously, and had made a journey through the poorer part of the city into a district of splendid residences and comfortable homes.

Stevens had been very careful to avoid men connected with the police. He had been out of prison less than a month, and the officers of the law were watching him. It seemed to make no difference that he had a job.

For Stevens did have a job. That was a part of his plan, though it was against his nature to labor save at nefarious work. A product of the slums, he became a crook, and for a time was lucky. And then there came a night when Stevens, partially under the influence of liquor, made a mistake. The pedestrian he attempted to rob at the point of a gun was a plainclothes man. He came up fighting, and Stevens found himself a prisoner, with no hope of avoiding conviction.

His trial was before Judge Kellar. Stevens lost hope when he learned that such was to be the case. Judge Kellar was harsh where habitual criminals were concerned, though merciful in cases where he thought it would do good. Since it was Stevens's first offense officially the penalty was a light one—two years in prison. Stevens expected that.

In prison he blamed all his troubles on the judge. If he was punished for an infraction of the rules he did not curse the warden or the guards, but the judge who had sentenced him. This state of mind developed until it was an obsession. An evil brain may be a dangerous thing.

Then Cliff Stevens began to plan against the day of his release. He would make Judge Kellar pay. He even threatened that he would do so, boasted of what he would accomplish, and though he spoke only to men of his own ilk, the threat reached official ears.

He intended to steal the effects of the Judge at every opportunity. And tonight he was to begin. First he planned to steal the Judge's high-powered racing roadster.

To some it might have seemed peculiar that a dignified judge would own such an automobile, but not to those who knew Kellar. The Judge thought out his legal problems and untangled judicial complications while driving at a high speed along the roads in the vicinity of the city.

Cliff Stevens knew all about that habit, and he felt that in stealing the roadster he not only would be making a comfortable profit for himself, but also would be striking at the Judge in a tender spot.

The crook had planned the thing well. He stole a key from the chauffeur that would fit the lock in the doors of the Judge's garage.

The car was known to hundreds of persons, but crouched down in the seat behind the wheel, his hat pulled low over his forehead, Cliff hoped to travel without interruption, for he banked on everybody believing that the Judge himself was driving. The hat he wore was like that which the Judge used on such nocturnal trips.

At the edge of the city Stevens had arranged to be met by another man, who would take charge of the car and drive it on to a barn on an abandoned farm some thirty miles away. Stevens would return to his lodging-house, and in the morning go to work on the wharf as usual. In the barn the Judge's valuable roadster would be altered so that no man would know it, and later it could be sold through a dealer in stolen cars, who conducted his business in another city.

"There can't be any slip," Cliff Stevens reflected. "I'll net me a nice little profit, and I'm hopin' it will worry that Judge. He needs to be worried!"

He cursed the Judge again beneath his breath and went on up the alley, close to the high board fence, walking slowly and silently, stopping now and then to listen and to look toward the distant street.

He passed two cross-streets without being observed, and then found himself in the block where Judge Kellar lived. He was more cautious now. There seemed to be no lights in the Judge's house at the rear except a dim one on the top floor in the servants' quarters.

He reached the garage and crouched against the fence again to watch and listen.

Stevens was feeling nervous again. He could not understand it. He tried to tell himself that it was because he was so recently out of prison that he still was cowed. Surely there was nothing so extra hazardous in unlocking those doors and rolling out an automobile.

"No sense in feelin' this way," he growled to himself.

Then he slipped forward along the fence until he touched the corner of the garage, took the key from his pocket, inserted it in the lock and turned it. Inch by inch he rolled back one of the heavy doors and fastened it. Then, after listening a moment longer, he rolled back the other.

A nauseating odor reached his nostrils. The crook sniffed at it and grinned.

"So he's been out already," he whispered. "The Judge has had his little ride and has put the can back in the barn, eh? Gosh, how that gas stinks! Must have raced his engine after he got in here, so as to leave her warm. Rotten smell!"

Cliff Stevens did not know exactly that gas and oil from the heated engine were giving off the odor, but he was smelling it, and subconsciously attempted to avoid inhaling it more than was necessary. He walked slowly along the side of the car, reached in and released the brake. He found that the car was not locked.

"Mighty careless of the Judge," he chuckled. "Not that it would have bothered me any, since I've got a bunch of special keys. Makes it a little easier—that's all."

He touched the hood and darted backward. The hood was warm, and that meant that the car had not been put up very long. The Judge, Stevens believed, had returned from a ride within the past few minutes. Very good. He probably had gone into the house and retired, and Stevens had no need to fear his sudden appearance.

Once more that unexplainable shiver chased up and down Stevens's spine and he shuddered a bit. He shook his shoulders as though to throw off a feeling he did not relish. Once more he stepped to the side of the car.

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## CHAPTER TWO

DETECTIVE HARRIS of the city police department had been sent to a country club a short distance outside of the city limits to investigate a theft from the lockers. At the club he had met several gentlemen to whom he was well and favorably known and had remained talking for some time after concluding his investigation.

He walked from the club, took a surface car, and journeyed down into the city. At

a certain point he left the car to transfer to another line.

Thereupon Detective Harris walked into a set of circumstances due to prove the undoing of Cliff Stevens.

A block down the street a small fire had broken out. Fire department apparatus charged past Harris, and for a few minutes the corner was blocked with engines, ladder trucks and lines of hose. Traffic at the corner was stopped.

Cliff Stevens, piloting the Judge's big roadster along the avenue, drove into this jam and was obliged to stop. He glanced around furtively and came to the decision that it would be better to turn around, cross to the next avenue, and so continue out of the city. He saw that he had ample room and began to turn the roadster.

He brushed against the curb on the opposite side of the street, and the front fender of the car almost struck Detective Harris. The detective saw and recognized Cliff Stevens—and saw and recognized the car. He knew a few things concerning Stevens and the Judge, too, and he had the knack of acting instantly.

Harris was on the running-board of the roadster before Stevens got the car straightened out. An automatic gleamed in the detective's hand and his eyes glittered.

"Drive slowly to the corner and stop at the curb, Stevens," Detective Harris said in a low, tense voice. "Sit still when you stop the car, and keep your hands on the steering-wheel. Don't forget this last little request, either."

The crook gulped and did as he had been commanded, since there was nothing else he could do. He knew that he had lost—that his first act of vengeance against Judge Kellar was his undoing. A single sob sounded in his throat as he thought that in a few days he would be returned to the big prison up the river.

He stopped the car at the corner, gulped again, and attempted some show of bravado.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"That is what I want to know," Harris said. "Since when did you become chauffeur to Judge Kellar?"

"I—I don't understand," Stevens stammered.

"This is the Judge's car, and it is past midnight," Harris informed him. "You're not very smooth, Cliff. You've been telling around that you'd get even with the Judge, and three or four nights you prowled around the Judge's place. Think you weren't being watched? I think we'll ride down to headquarters."

"But, Mr. Harris——"

"And we'll start at once," Detective Harris continued, a stern note in his voice. "I thought that job of yours on the wharf was a blind. It's not on the books of life that you could live only by the sweat of your brow. Start on to headquarters!"

Stevens, his heart heavy, did as he had been directed, for he knew that there was no escape. Already he saw himself in court, and was planning a plea that he hoped would reach a tender spot in the heart of the Judge. This would be his second incarceration, and would be longer, no doubt. If he could only get some good lawyer——

Headquarters reached, they left the car at the curb and Detective Harris took Cliff Stevens inside. He explained to the night captain, who instructed a desk sergeant to get Judge Kellar's house on the telephone and ask a few questions. The automobile thief sat on a bench in the detention room, Harris watching him closely.

"Hard lines, Cliff," he said; "but it is your own fault. A man like you couldn't go straight, of course, yet you had a chance. It certainly was a mistake to boast about what you were going to do to the Judge. We've been watching you because of those little boasts—understand? Every stool pigeon in town reported what you had said. Cliff, you never planned to handle that car yourself, and if you'll put us wise to the car-thief gang I'll try to get you off with a common jail sentence. Think it over."

The captain stepped into the room.

"No chance for a small jail sentence!" he said gruffly. "Well, Cliff, this is the end for you, I guess."

"What—what do you mean?" Stevens gasped.

"You don't know, I suppose," the cap-

tain replied with a sneer. "How did you expect to get away with it, Cliff?"

"I—I don't understand."

"Shut up!" the captain commanded. "We have got you, and you know it. It'll be the electric chair for you."

Stevens sprang to his feet, but without intention of making an attack or attempting an escape. He was merely bewildered, and the peculiar thrill was running up and down his back again.

"What—what——!" he gasped.

"Judge Kellar has been found dead in his garage," the captain said. "His head was smashed with a heavy sledge. So you got square with the Judge, didn't you, Cliff?"

Cliff Stevens screamed like a madman and collapsed on the bench again.

"It's a lie—a lie!" he cried. "You're kidding me! I never saw the Judge tonight—haven't seen him for more than two weeks."

"And you were caught driving his car."

"Yes—yes!" Cliff Stevens gasped. "I stole his car, all right. I was going to sell it. I was going to steal things from the Judge as fast as I could."

"Better tell us about it," said the captain, winking at Detective Harris.

"Yes, sir—I'll tell you, sir. I had it all planned to steal the car, and I went up there just at midnight. I had been there before a couple of times to look over the ground. I had a key to fit the lock on the garage. I opened the doors and rolled the car out, sir, and then drove it away. And Mr. Harris caught me at that corner where the fire department was blocking the way. That's all, sir."

"And while you were in the garage you met the Judge and killed him!" the captain accused.

"No, sir! I——"

"Your story is mighty thin, Cliff."

"I've told the truth, sir."

"Rats!" the captain exclaimed. "It's a cinch—this case. But we'll make sure of you, Cliff. A fine man like the Judge to be killed by a rat like you! Harris, call Perrin here, please."

Harris hurried in search of Perrin, who belonged to the homicide squad, for the case belonged to the homicide squad now. Cliff Stevens remained on the bench swearing that he had not killed Kellar. He ceased his raving when Detective John Perrin walked into the room and looked at him.

Detective Perrin was easily the freak of the force. He did not look at all like a detective. He was a small man, with stooped shoulders, and wore spectacles. He appeared like an overworked, half-ill bookkeeper. It was with difficulty that he had passed the physical examination, and at the time of his appointment the chief had gnashed his teeth with rage and called upon high Heaven to witness that he could not have an efficient force when they accredited such men to him.

But Detective John Perrin early in his career had demonstrated that he possessed brains and also the rare faculty of knowing exactly how to use them. His methods were peculiarly his own, but he got results. What others on the force called a mystery was no mystery to John Perrin. He simply applied common sense to the facts and arrived at a conclusion.

John Perrin heard the captain's story and then turned toward Cliff Stevens.

"I didn't do it—didn't do it!" Stevens panted. "There must be some mistake. I stole the car—I admit it—but I never saw the Judge. Why, I was plannin' to steal things from him right along. I wouldn't have planned that if I meant to kill him."

"Perhaps you didn't mean to kill him," the captain said, "but it is possible that he walked into the garage and caught you trying to get away with the car, and that you were forced to hit him. The mistake you made was in hitting him a bit too hard and crushing his skull."

"I didn't!" Stevens screamed. "I never saw the Judge tonight. I admit that I took the car."

Perrin grunted and turned toward the door, and the captain ordered the prisoner put into a cell. In the corridor outside John Perrin struggled into a topcoat.

"Take Harris with you, Perrin," the captain said. "He caught Stevens with that roadster. Drive the car, if you wish."

"Can't drive," Perrin said.

"I'll drive it," Harris declared.

They hurried to the street and sprang into the car, and Harris guided the machine carefully up the street, glad to have a chance of driving it.

"Looks like curtains for Stevens," he remarked.

"Hard to tell now," Perrin answered with a grunt.

"Are you crazy, Perrin? What could be more plain? Stevens has been threatening to get Judge Kellar, who sentenced him. He's been hanging around the Judge's place. He simply waited until the Judge went to the garage to take a night drive, and then smashed him on the head and didn't have any more sense than to try to get away in the car."

"Hard to tell," Perrin said. "Did you take a look at Stevens?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Didn't act like a guilty murderer."

"Rats! He was playing a part to try and save himself."

"Hasn't sense enough to act well," Perrin declared.

"I caught him with the roadster, didn't I?"

"Surely. He admits he was stealing the car, but that doesn't say he murdered the Judge."

"Seems to me you have a lot of sympathy for Stevens."

"Not at all. Born a crook," Perrin grunted. "Ought to be sent up again for stealing the car, but I don't want to see a man go to the chair for something he didn't do. Haven't made a decision, of course. Look over the ground first."

They drove through the alley to the rear of the garage. The lights were on, and two frightened servants were standing there. The coroner's men had not yet arrived.

John Perrin took charge and made an immediate investigation. The body of the Judge was stretched on the floor of the garage at one side. The head was crushed. Beside the body was a heavy sledge, the head of it stained dark red.

"Who found him?" Perrin asked.

"I found him, aided by the footman, sir," the butler said. "I knew that the Judge was going to take a ride and saw him come to the garage. There were no lights on, and I did not hear the car driven away. I waited almost fifteen minutes, sir. And then I heard the doors of the garage open softly. I realized, sir, that the car was being driven slowly along the alley with the lights out and thought it peculiar, so I called the footman, and we came out to investigate, sir, and found—this."

"See anybody prowling around?"

"No, sir. It was very dark, of course, and the light on the corner does not reach the garage."

"How about the sledge-hammer?"

"It belongs here in the garage, sir—has been here as long as I can remember."

"Um!" Perrin grunted, and Detective Harris grinned. Nothing could be more simple, Harris thought. Caught trying to steal the car, Cliff Stevens had grasped the nearest thing at hand, the heavy sledge, and struck a fatal blow.

The coroner's men arrived at this juncture, and Detective Perrin stepped back to let them conduct an investigation of their own. Then he took the coroner's physician aside and held a whispered conversation with him, then ordered the body removed.

When the coroner's men had gone Perrin instructed the two servants to return to the house, and then while Harris sat in a corner and waited Perrin made a more minute examination of the garage.

He examined the doors and the windows, closing all of them tightly. The sides of the garage were plastered, but the ceiling was not sealed, and there were heavy rafters above. Detective Perrin got upon a bench and inspected the rafters, grunted, then got down again. He went across to the fatal sledge, which had not been touched, and bent over it and looked at it closely. When he stood up again there was a gleam in his eyes.

"Life is a funny thing," he said to himself. "Death comes swiftly, and when it is least expected. Little accidents can wreck the lives of men at any time."

"What's all that got to do with a crook like Cliff Stevens?" Harris wanted to know.

John Perrin did not answer. Instead,

he beckoned Harris out through the front.

"Harris, we'll run the car into the yard and leave it," he said. "We'll leave the garage undisturbed for the present and then we'll get back to headquarters."

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## CHAPTER THREE

"WELL?" the captain asked.

Harris and John Perrin were back in the private office ready to make a report.

"Looks like a cinch to me, Chief," Harris said. "The Judge's head was crushed with a sledge-hammer they kept in the garage. The Judge went to take one of his night drives, opened the door and walked in on Stevens. Stevens smashed him a bit too hard and then, in a panic, tried to get away with the car."

"I suppose so," the captain said. "That right, Perrin?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"You mean you think Stevens didn't do it?"

"I'll know in a few minutes, sir," Perrin said. "The coroner's physician promised to telephone me here; and I'd like to have Cliff Stevens in here, sir."

The captain had Stevens brought into the office. Stevens was almost like a madman. "I didn't do it!" he kept repeating.

"You keep quiet and answer a few questions," John Perrin said. "And don't make any mistakes, either. You had a key to the doors of the garage?"

"Yes, sir."

"After you opened the door, what did you do?"

"Slipped inside and alongside the car," Cliff Stevens said.

"Tell me everything—every little thing," Perrin demanded.

"Well, I was startled at first. The garage seemed to be full of dead gas—you know, that odor that comes from an engine that has been raced, or after a cold engine has been started."

"Go on."

"That told me that the car had been running recently," Cliff Stevens said. "I was a bit amused at that, for I thought the Judge had been takin' one of his night rides and had come home to go to bed. I wouldn't have to worry about him walking in on me, you see."

"Go on," Perrin commanded.

"I walked along the car and released the brake so I could roll the car out. The ignition wasn't locked, sir, and I supposed the Judge had been careless. And the hood was hot."

"Sure of that?" Perrin snapped.

"Yes, sir. It was hot, and that told me the Judge had been out with the car and had just put it up. I backed the car out of the garage, ran it down the alley a couple of blocks without turning on the lights, and then snapped on the lights, turned into a street and started to make my getaway. That's all I know, sir. I never killed the Judge—I didn't see him at all."

"Thin tale!" Harris put in.

"I have an idea that he is telling the truth," Perrin said.

"Perrin, you're insane. He's been threatening the Judge and tonight he got the chance to do for him."

Perrin was called to the telephone. When he returned his face was beaming.

"Ready to report now, sir," he told the captain. "That message was from the coroner's physician."

"Well?" the captain asked.

John Perrin sat down at one end of the desk and looked over at the prisoner.

"Cliff Stevens," he said, "you're no good. You're not a man who has made a slip and are to be pitied. You were born a crook and reared among crooks. You're a natural thief, but you're not a murderer!"

Cliff Stevens gulped his relief. The captain and Detective Harris merely stared.

"Nothing much to this case," Perrin said. "I judged from Stevens's manner that he never killed the Judge, but I couldn't go much on that, of course. I wanted proof. If Stevens didn't kill him, who did? Now I know."

"Well, who killed him, then?"

"Accident," said John Perrin. "Let this thing be a lesson to you, Stevens. You

were pretty close to the chair. Almost any jury would have convicted you. When you get out of prison again better try to live a decent life."

"Tell us what you mean, man!" the captain commanded.

"Very well, sir. The Judge, wanting to take a night drive, went to the garage. It was chilly, and so he did not open the doors before starting the car. He got into the car, touched the starter, and raced the engine to get it hot. That garage, captain, is sealed tight, and there is nothing more poisonous than carbon monoxide, that comes from a big car just being started when the engine is cold.

"The Judge felt himself growing unconscious. He stumbled out of the car. He had been using the foot accelerator, and when he got out the gas was shut off; the car has an attachment that cuts off the ignition automatically if a man forgets to turn it off. Gasping with the fumes of the poisonous gas, the Judge started to get to the front door and out into the air, but he was rapidly being overcome. He staggered, crashed against the wall. The sledge was on a rafter above. The jar against the wall dislodged it. It fell and struck the Judge on the temple, killing him.

"A few minutes later Stevens got into the garage. He didn't turn on the lights. He smelled the foul odor and he found the engine still warm. He rolled the car out and drove away, not knowing that he had been within a few feet of the Judge's lifeless body."

"I've got to have more than a theory," the captain said.

"Yes, sir," said John Perrin. "That sledge was covered with dust, for instance, and the handle failed to show that anybody had grasped it and wiped away the dust. Not a hand mark on it, sir, and the rafter showed plainly where the sledge had been lying in the dust. No man smashed the judge with that sledge. His body was against the wall. There was plaster on one of the shoulders of his coat, showing where he lurched against it as he fell. It was plain that he struck it heavily enough to dislodge the sledge-hammer.

"I spoke to the coroner's physician, sir, at the garage. He just called me up, sir, and he says that the Judge was probably dead before sledge struck him—the carbon monoxide did it, sir, according to the doctor."

Cliff Stevens was sobbing his relief. The captain ordered him taken back to his cell.

"You are one lucky man, Stevens," he said. "If John Perrin hadn't used a little common sense on this case you'd be as good as executed right now."

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## HOUNDED BY HIS PAST

AFTER Washington Force had told of his "coming back" after a term in prison, his marriage, his promotion to a lucrative job, which he lost when his employer accidentally discovered he had been in prison, and then of temptation that made him an offender again, County Judge Vause in Brooklyn sentenced him and told him to apply to the Court for help when released.

Force was sentenced in 1918 to two years in Sing Sing prison for burglary. Recently he was charged with burglary.

"When I was released five years ago," Force told the Court, "I made up my mind I would never get into trouble again. I got a job at $9 a week. I worked up to $42 a week. I married and was happy in the satisfaction that my past was buried. Then one day I was picked out for assistant cashier, which meant another increase in salary. It was necessary to place me under bond. That started an investigation, which showed I had served time. Then my employer dismissed me."

Vainly seeking work for a long time, Force said, he finally was made desperate by the needs of his family. He was permitted to plead guilty to a lesser crime, attempted burglary in the third degree, first offense.

# *The* Purple Dragon Inn

By VERA CUMMING VIELE

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER ONE

IT happened at a time when wayside inns were very popular, a few years ago. I was spending a rare evening at home reading my favorite author, Victor Hugo, when the Chief telephoned me to go out to the Purple Dragon Inn, about twenty miles from the city, where a promient coffee merchant, Jack Parrish, had been murdered shortly after his arrival there with a woman.

The inn is situated at the end of a short avenue which branches off the old Knickerbocker Road. As you enter the last half-mile you will see a white rambling house.

A peaceful looking place, resembling an old farm-house, which it probably was before it was converted into an inn.

The interior is where you get a big surprise. You would think you had just walked from our good old United States into Cuba, and you then see at a glance where the inn gets its name. Purple dragons greet the eyes on all sides and purple shades that blend into lavender were used in the rich hangings of silk at the windows and doors. The electric light fixtures were awful-looking dragons, with large purple eyes. The floors were covered with thick Chinese rugs of a royal lavender color, and each table had a small lamp of dragon design with a colored silk shade. On every table stood a fine glass vase with a purple iris surrounded with yellow jonquil flowers. At one end of the large main dining-room there was a short flight of stairs leading to a landing, off which four private dining-rooms were located At the foot of the stairs on the left-hand side was a ladies lounging-room and smoking-room, and between this room and the stairs a large pedestal. On the top of it squatted the giant figure of a Buddha, fragrant incense burning in front of it.

At the other end of the room rose a small platform on which five Hawaiian musicians were seated playing soft, sweet ukelele music.

All the waiters were white men dressed in mandarin coats of gray satin and trousers of the same material. The coats had a huge purple dragon embroidered across the front and back.

Parrish had been murdered in one of the small private dining-rooms at the head of the stairs.

To reach the room where the body lay I crossed the main dining-room to the steps at the side of the giant Buddha.

After walking up seven short steps I found myself in a narrow hall or landing in full view of the main dining-room. The private rooms opened off this hall, and Parrish's body was in the front room nearest the stairs.

The gigantic figure of the statue rather hid the door of the room from the diners, but no one could have walked in the hall without the diners observing them. There were no windows in the room, and only one door. The ventilation came through a round hole near the ceiling covered with an iron grating. Jack Parrish was a slender, athletic-looking fellow, of medium height, with a handsome face and a thick mass of reddish blond hair. His was the type of masculine charms usually attractive to women, and I found he had his share of ladies who thought him very lovable. The splendid figure of the murdered man was in a chair at the table, which was at the side of the

small room. His torso was bent over and his head had fallen amidst the dishes.

An ugly two-edged knife protruded between his shoulders and the blade had penetrated his heart, probably killing him instantly.

When I examined the knife for fingerprints I found it devoid of any. It looked as if the whole thing had been cleverly planned, for there didn't seem to be a clue to be found anywhere.

The floor of the room was covered with a heavy Persian rug of a dull shade of tan, except the center, where a gigantic purple dragon held sway.

I learned that the woman who had entered the room with Parrish had vanished as if by magic. She had not passed out of the door I had entered that any of the diners had noticed. Yet that was the only exit from the room.

The excited manager of the place, a fat little cherub of a man named Le Deiur, followed me around while I made a survey of the place. I sounded the walls for a secret passage, but the walls seemed as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar.

This puzzled me, as I knew the criminal would have to know of a way to escape before entering the room. If it were the woman she could not have blundered on a secret exit after she had killed Parrish.

Le Deiur, the manager, informed me that the owner of the inn was a South American named Jose Pasquale. He had been traveling in Europe some time. I told the manager to get the waiter who had served the couple. As he hurried away I gave the walls another survey, and the dragon's eyes seemed to follow me mockingly while I searched.

In a few moments the manager returned with the waiter, George Pietro, who had served the couple, and he looked as if he had just got out of a bed of sickness.

"Tell me all you know about this," I demanded.

"Well, sir, the manager told me there was a couple in the small room," he answered. "When I entered with the dinner that had been ordered for them the lady asked for a cocktail. I had already served them one with the dinner."

"While you were in there did they converse any?"

"The only thing I heard them say to each other was when the gentleman asked the lady how she knew of the Purple Dragon Inn. She just smiled, and the man looked puzzled, and did not question her further."

"How was the lady dressed? Can you describe her?"

The waiter looked nonplussed for a minute, as almost any man would when asked to describe feminine clothes; then he brightened some as if he had mastered the right words.

"Why, she had on a black dress, sir; what you would call an evening dress. She also wore long white gloves, and around her neck she had a string of pearls which looked as if they were very fine, sir. I noticed that she had short bobbed hair. It was very dark—black, I should say. She also had very fine teeth and thick red lips."

"Was there anything unusual about her?"

"I thought she had fat, thick hands."

After dismissing the waiter I examined the cutlery at the mysterious lady's place at the table for fingerprints. Then I inspected the knife in Parrish's back, and was puzzled to find there was not a clue to be found on either.

Going into the main dining-room I questioned the white-faced group of guests, but no one could tell me a thing of value. After taking their names and addresses for future reference, I allowed them to depart.

After giving orders to close the inn, I sent for the chauffeur of Parrish's car. Selecting a table near the stairs leading to the room where Parrish had met such a sudden end, I thought while quizzing the chauffeur I would try to solve the mystery of how the criminal escaped without being seen.

The giant Buddha was situated at the left of the stairs and the floor of the hallway was only about half the height of the statue. The top of its head rather hid the entrance to the little room where Parrish had been slain.

"Suppose that statue had an opening in it?" I muttered. "A person could easily

hide in there and maybe is there now. It must be investigated."

Parrish's chauffeur made his appearance at this moment and I told him to sit down and wait for me, as I wanted to have a better look at the Buddha.

The huge figure was made of bronze and must have cost a small fortune. I tried in every way to discover a secret opening into its body without any success, although the thing sounded hollow, and was certainly large enough to conceal a big person.

After failing to find an opening into the statue I seated myself at the table fronting the thing and tried to vision the escape of the assassin from the little room.

Then I questioned Parrish's chauffeur, whose name was Tim Burns.

I learned that he had taken Mr. Parrish to the Ritz Hotel and was told to wait for a few minutes until he came out with a lady.

Next I asked Burns if he knew who the lady was, or had she ever been in the car before with Mr. Parrish.

"Yes," the chauffeur admitted, "she had been in the car a couple of times before. He had always gone to the Ritz to get her, but I'm under the impression that she only met Parrish in the lobby, as he always returned to the car inside of five minutes with her."

I asked him where he had driven the lady and his master on other occasions.

"The first time Mr. Parrish took her to his office," answered the chauffeur, "and I waited for them and drove them back to the Grand Central railroad station. The lady got out there and my boss got back into the car. Next time we called for her at the Ritz and I drove them around the Park slowly. Mr. Parrish was trying to induce her to buy some stock."

"Was Mr. Parrish a bachelor?" I asked him.

"No, sir. He had been married, but was not living with his wife; but they were not divorced."

"Did you ever see Mrs. Parrish?"

"No, I never did."

"You do not know positively whether this lady was his wife or not?"

"No, sir; he never said anything about it. Personally I thought she was a client. The day I drove them in the Park and heard him trying to get her to buy stock, I thought he would not be trying to sell to his wife."

"Do you know where I could meet his wife?"

"I heard that his estranged wife lived in New Jersey, but I do not know where."

"Did you hear any of the conversation in the car while coming to the inn?"

"Only a few words. The lady seemed to be a foreigner of some sort. I guessed she was French, as she spoke with a slight accent and had a deep, throaty voice. One seldom heard one like it."

"Now, Burns, can you describe what the lady was wearing?"

"I'll say I can," grinned Burns. "After going to the shops the past three years with my wife, and having to listen to her talk clothes, I think I am well posted on styles for women. This here mysterious lady was the last word in clothes. Everything she wore was the most expensive of its kind, if I am any judge. She had on a black chiffon-velvet evening gown, a string of pearl beads, long white kid gloves, and black patent-leather pumps. She also wore a long black fur cape, and carried a medium-sized black bag that looked new. It was one of those bags that my wife says they call Overnite bags."

"About the age of this lady, Burns?"

"Couldn't say as to that, sir, as she always wore one of those large white veils that covered her face, and a small hat that came way down over her eyes."

"How long have you been with Mr. Parrish?"

"About one year now."

"Do you know anything about his private life?"

"Certainly."

"Tell me of any affairs of your master with women that might throw some light on this murder mystery? Is there any one who might have reason to murder him through jealousy?"

"The boss was always good to me, and I will not give away any of his affairs now; but if I could bring the one to justice that killed him I would tell any old secret."

After asking him a few more questions and getting his address, I told him that would be all for that night, as I wanted to look around the Purple Dragon Inn. Burns said he would like to stick around also to see if I found out anything important, or he would like to help me if I needed his assistance.

After wandering about the place I finally sat down at the same table and stared again at those stairs as if they could tell me how Parrish's lady friend got away from the little room without being seen.

At the head of the staairs was the ladies' smoking-room and lounge. Any one coming down the stairs in a hurry could easily have dodged in there. And once inside they could have stepped out of the low window onto the side porch, reached the wooded grounds, and so escaped.

The diners had all said they did not see a lady come down the stairs at the time of the crime. Then the idea struck me that if the criminal had one of those mandarin coats to throw over his clothes he could have walked down the stairs and into the smoking-room and away, leaving the impression that it was one of the waiters. The trick would have to be accomplished while the other waiters were away from the stairs, and the manager out of sight.

It was reasonable to assume that the diners would not pay any attention to a waiter passing by.

The manager had said he was at the kitchen telephone when the murder took place, and it happened that all of the waiters were in the kitchen after their orders.

I went to the manager, who was huddled in a chair in his private office, and asked him if he had any extra mandarin coats like those the waiters wore.

"No," he replied; "there are just six coats and six waiters to wear them."

"Did you ever have more than six coats?"

"Yes, there had been another one," he answered, "but a discharged waiter took it away with him some weeks ago."

"Who was this fellow, and where does he live?"

"I think his name was Fredrico Mattus. He has been gone a month at least. He was a young man from South America, a delicate, effeminate-looking fellow, with a soft voice. He spoke French and Spanish fluently and English with a slight accent."

I had been told that Parrish was a frequent visitor to South America, where he went to buy coffee. If Parrish had incurred the hatred of this man, why could it not have been Mattus dressed in woman's clothes who had stabbed Parrish?

It was a powerful blow that had killed him, and almost impossible for a woman to have struck it.

I pondered deeply. Of course if there was no secret exit from the place, I reasoned, it would not have been much risk for a man dressed as a waiter to escape.

The manager's description of the discharged waiter fitted in with the type of a man who could masquerade as a woman. The manager gave me the last address of Fredrico Mattus.

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## CHAPTER TWO

GOING back to the main dining-room, I sat down at the table. That Buddha fascinated me and seemed to invite me to look him over again. It seemed such a good place for concealment. I started up the stairs toward it just as Le Deiur, the manager, came to see if I wanted him.

"I want to look your giant over once more, then I will call it an evening's work, go home and let the coroner do the rest," I said.

Standing back of the statue, I felt all over its polished surface, and after a long time I was rewarded by finding that by touching a certain part of the head it released a spring that held a long, narrow door. It slid down noiselessly.

I called the manager and Tim Burns, the chauffeur. Inside there was a small round platfom. The manager was truly surprised, and I told him to get in it and I would see if he could open it from the inside. He stepped in. I closed the door and told him to feel around on the inside to see if he

could find the way to open the door. Presently I heard him utter a startled cry and hastened to open the slide door to reassure him, but the platform was empty.

I showed Burns how to open the secret door, and dispatched another waiter to the basement of the inn to help me in case I landed there in some kind of trap. Then I stepped in on the platform, closed the door of the statue, and awaited results. My hand found a small object like an electric-light push-button, and the flooring I was standing on began to lower like an automatic elevator. It quickly dropped me into a small wine-room in the basement, and there I found the manager, a nervous wreck, but unhurt. He had fallen off the platform on reaching the basement.

The room we were in was filled with fine wines, and the manager suggested that we open a bottle to steady our nerves. I thought it rather a good idea myself.

When I searched the place I found a long, white kid glove on the floor, but no footprints or anything else in the shape of a clue.

The door had a Yale lock, so all we had to do was to open it from our side and walk out into the basement.

The waiter whom I had sent to the basement was startled to see us, as the door seemed to be part of the stone wall. As there was a door leading up into the side-yard of the inn, where the tradespeople delivered their supplies in the daytime, the criminal could have escaped that way.

None of the chauffeurs had seen any one walking around the grounds during the evening, they had told me, nor had any car been taken away.

The nearest railroad station was about a mile from the inn, so I decided to stop there and question the agent, and also make a few inquiries in the neighborhood. The agent at that station was just closing up for the night when I arrived. He said only one passenger left the station that night. The lone passenger was a farmer from the neighborhood whom he had known all his life. So I passed him up as the possible criminal.

I decided then that it was time I had a little rest. I intended to go home that night, and start fresh in the morning. I also concluded to telephone my nephew, Jerry Creton, to go with me to see Mrs. Parrish next day.

(*Concluded in the next issue.*)

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## "THE LONE WOLF"

HUGO WILLGRADT, alias Hugh Wills, 31 years old, who was arrested at Fordham road and Tiebout avenue, the Bronx, admitted, according to the police, eight robberies, including the holdup of a United Cigar Store at 146th street and Willis avenue, on September 21 last.

Willgradt is known to the police as "the lone wolf." According to the police whenever he has found checks or papers in his loot, he has returned them to the police with notes signed "the lone wolf." All of the holdups Willgradt is said to have admitted were of A. & P. or Daniel Reeves stores.

Willgradt will not be arraigned at once. He will be taken to Police Headquarters for further questioning to clear up details regarding holdups of which the police suspect him. According to the police Willgradt was formerly an executive of a Fifth avenue dry goods store and is the son of a wealthy dry goods man.

Willgradt was arrested by Detectives Gobert, Sullivan and Bransato of the Alexander avenue station, the Bronx, who have been trailing him for several days.. When they took him to the station, he is said to have admitted at once the robbery of the Willis avenue cigar store, when he forced Morris Kometsky, the clerk, into a rear room at the point of a revolver and robbed the cash register of $47.

# *The* Fingerprint

By SIM YAM

DR. HENRY MARKLE, M.D., after an all-night mental debate finally came to the conclusion that only one way remained by which he could avenge himself upon his colleague. His contemplated victim was Doctor Charles Graham, the eminent physician with whom he shared a large, well-furnished office.

Markle's hate for the doctor had its tragic birth at the time Graham married the girl they both had loved. It not only surprised Markle, but it cut him to the quick and left a deep wound that would not heal for years. Although few realized it, this blow had changed the whole outlook of Markle upon life. He lived only for revenge upon the man who every one thought was his bosom friend.

Graham had been easily elected to the Medical Research Board, the goal for which Markle had been striving so earnestly that he had almost forgotten his hatred for Graham.

Markle knew that he must strike down this rival or suffer other humiliations. Years had rolled by; Graham's wife had died, and the two doctors had shared not only offices and laboratories but each other's medical secrets.

But Markle never forgot his thirst for vengeance.

A grim smile crinkled the corners of Markle's hardened mouth as he thought of how cleverly he had concealed his true attitude toward Graham.

A plan had finally formed itself which to him seemed perfect. He had an old wooden-handled knife not unlike thousands of others of its kind. Moreover, the handle was made of a material on which fingerprints could not be distinguished.

That morning he strolled down to the office from his room in an unpretentious boarding-house and joined the man upon whom he had planned vengeance. He did not like to think of the words "to kill," of their sinister meaning or of what would follow if he were caught. He was uncomfortably cold when he reached the office; his hand, which held the knife, was damp with perspiration. The stenographer had not yet arrived and, much to his relief, the outer office was empty.

Graham was in the inner office, however, bending over the file. He glanced up, spoke as Markle entered, and passed around him to hang up his hat. A gleam of hate was glowing in Markle's eyes. He grasped the knife more firmly, raised his hand and lunged forward, the fingers of his left hand pressed on the table.

He was surprised that it had been so easy and so quick. Not a sound followed but the crash of the body upon the floor. He glanced at his victim and saw that he was dead. Then he swiftly and quietly crossed over the room and opened the window next to the fire-escape.

A moment later he left the office, called up the police and notified them of the murder. Doctor Markle was amazed at his coolness as he waited for the authorities.

Finally, after what seemed to be hours of anxiety, they arrived. Markle met them with almost a smile on his dried-up, wrinkled face. "I came down early this morning," he said. "We always come early on Mondays. I saw at a glance that poor Graham was dead when I opened the door, so I hurried out and notified you."

Four burly policemen and a plainclothes man had entered. The latter was Detective Stafford, noted for his shrewdness in solving police mysteries. Naturally the presence of such a man on the case annoyed Markle, but he steadied himself by a mental effort.

"Who is killed?" Stafford questioned the doctor, his sharp eyes drilling into Markle's dim orbs as if they were trying to penetrate his brain.

"Doctor Graham. We share the office together." Markle had by this time almost complete control over himself and his voice was firm and steady.

He opened the door leading to the inner office, and the policemen walked in. Graham was lying on his back, the knife sticking from the back of his neck.

"Is everything exactly as it was when you first entered the room?" asked Stafford.

"I did not enter the room entirely," replied Markle. "I came in just far enough to see the body." His voice was steady with self-confidence.

"Then of course nothing has been disturbed," said the detective. "There is no doubt that he has been killed by this knife. There are, I see, no fingerprints on the knife handle. Had Doctor Graham any enemies that you know of?"

"None to my knowledge. It is my opinion that he was attacked by burglars, who, being interrupted by my entering, fled by the fire-escape. I was so surprised that I did not think to look for clues, but I think that my theory is highly probable, as we keep valuable bonds here." He spoke without the least bit of fear, as he really believed that the crime could not be solved by the officer.

"Well, that's possible," answered Stafford. "We must not overlook any possible solution."

A policeman entered with the elevator boy. When questioned, he said he had not let any one up so early in the morning except the two doctors. He was not sure about the time when they arrived. His testimony seemed to ring so true that he was dismissed without suspicion resting upon him.

"Undoubtedly this business is very disagreeable to you, Doctor," said Detective Stafford politely, "and it will be perfectly all right if you wish to leave and attend to whatever business you may have."

"On the contrary, sir," smiled Markle, "I have no important work on hand, and as Doctor Graham was such a good friend of mine, I naturally am very anxious to see that every effort is made to find the guilty party."

The sun was slowly rising over the tops of the sky-scrapers, and as Doctor Markle watched it the golden beams made eerie, weird shadows on the highly polished furniture. Then suddenly his eyes came to rest upon the spot on the table where he had pressed his fingers when he stabbed Graham. His hands began to get cold and small beads of perspiration came out on his forehead. Again he furtively gazed at the damning piece of evidence, a fingerprint, his fingerprint, in blood! He wondered why the detectives did not see the mark. It glared beneath the bright rays of the sun and made him shiver. He knew that it might send him to the chair. With a great effort he casually sat down and began to light a cigarette, thinking fast, because he knew his life depended on it.

He suddenly thought of a plan; the cigarette—to lay it down until it burned the wood and destroyed the fingerprint; otherwise they would surely discover it.

He calmly placed the cigarette on the edge of the table, partly covering the fingerprint. How slowly it seemed to burn! Just one more minute and it would reach the telltale mark. Markle rubbed his hands together to increase the circulation, trying all the time to assure himself that he was safe, though his heart was fairly bursting with fear. His breath came in short gasps as he tried to become interested in the official examination of the body. Just thirty seconds and Stafford was walking over to the table. Had he noticed the fingerprint? Was he really looking at Markle as if he suspected him? Just a few more seconds and the fire would reach it. He became dizzy as he watched the fiery tip.

Detective Stafford walked to the table and picked up the cigarette. He held it toward Markle with a smile.

"Just saw that in time; a little carelessness on your part. I know you wouldn't want to burn the table."

Markle became pale with fear. The de-

tective had known it all the time. Unable to restrain himself, he made a wild dash for the fire-escape, instinctively, to escape. But he found himself weak with fear in the hands of two muscular policemen, who held him.

"Markle," yelled the detective, "did you kill him?"

"God, yes!" he screamed, and then collapsed.

That evening Detective Stafford was explaining the case to his fellow-workers: "Markle kept on watching that cigarette so closely that I just had to know what there was connected with it. So I handed it to him. He certainly must have thought that his fingerprint in blood was stamped on the table, and he sure was taking a clever means of getting it off. Of course he knew that he would have attracted suspicion if he had deliberately walked over and wiped it off. But it wasn't his fingerprint at all. It was the maid's who polished the table. She had left her fingerprint in the liquid polish, and the slanting rays of the sun on the mahogany veneer only made it look like blood."

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## KEEPS IT HIDDEN UNDER HAT

CLAYTON RAUB, twenty-eight, of Elkhart, Ind., was lodged in Montcalm County jail at Stanton after his first exploit in bank robbing, the raiding of the Trufant State Bank.

Something of a mystery still ceils details regarding the recovery of more than $500 Raub scooped up on the counters of the bank after locking Andrew Peterson, cashier, in the vault, and Sheriff William Smith and his officers were reticent.

Raub, after being taken from a train by a deputy, confessed the robbery and said he buried the money and his gun between two houses in Pierson, where he took the train.

Raub wore a cap during the robbery and it remained jauntily on his head while he was in jail. The sheriff did not remind him of jail etiquette.

Many hours after the capture, Sheriff Curtis of Montcalm County took the prisoner to Pierson to help find the money. Raub, with a quick motion of his hand, knocked off his cap and the money fell to the ground. The gun Raub said he buried was produced in similar manner, although he had been searched and was thought unarmed.

Statement of the ownership, management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of "MYSTERY MAGAZINE," published semi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1924. State of New York, County of New York:—Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Luis Senarens, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Editor of the "MYSTERY MAGAZINE," and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication, for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor and business manager are: Publisher—Harry E. Wolff, Publisher, Inc., 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y. Editor—Luis Senarens, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor—None. Business Manager—None.

2. That the owners are: Harry E. Wolff, Publisher, Inc., 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; Harry E. Wolff, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; M. N. Wolff, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; J. F. Desbecker, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; R. W. Desbecker, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; C. W. Hastings, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona-fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds or other securities than as so stated by him

LUIS SENARENS, Editor.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 24th day of September, 1924.—Seymour W. Steiner. (My Commission expires March 30, 1926.)

# *Our Next Offering*

Always on the alert to please our readers, we have prepared a splendid collection of stories for our next issue. The feature novelette was written by one of the best authors in the business. It contains every element of good plot, exciting incident, and deep mystery that forms the basis of a first-class detective story. Watch for it.

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The great station WJZ broadcast one more of our short stories, and you must have heard it on your radio.

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The above-mentioned items are only part of the material to appear as our next offering. We have secured some particularly gripping short articles to fill various niches in the magazine, every one of which will afford you some solid entertainment. Be sure to look them over.

**You May Have Noticed**

that we have departed from our usual custom of mentioning the titles of our coming stories. This was done to arouse your curiosity to see what our next number is going to contain.

**It Will Surprise You—Do Not Fail To Get A Copy**

THE EDITOR

# MYSTERY MAGAZINE

**The feature stories already published in this magazine are worth reading. The following are the titles of the novelettes contained in the numbers already printed.**

111 "Trapping the Jewel Smugglers," by B. Poynter.
112 "The Missing Evidence," by Harold F. Podhaski.
113 "A Clue by Radio," by Capt. Jack Static.
114 "The District Attorney's Secret," by C. Oursler.
115 "A Man From Headquarters," by H. Craigie.
116 "The Girl in the Case," by Carl Glick.
117 "A Scientific Detective," by D. G. McDonald.
118 "Number Nine Queer Street," by Jack Bechdolt.
119 "Trailed by a Private Detective," by Gottlieb Jacobs.
120 "The Mouse Trap," by Edith Sessions Tupper.
121 "A Radio Mystery," by Capt. Jack Static
122 "The Clawing Death," by Beulah Poynter.
123 "A Master of Millions," by Chas. Fulton Oursler
124 "The Secret of Room 13," by Hamilton Craigie.
125 "Six Months to Live," by George Bronson-Howard.
126 "Seals of Wax," by Jack Bechdolt.
127 "When Crooks Conspire," by Harold F. Podhaski.
128 "The Mystery of the Blue Car," by H. Craigie
129 "The Detective and the Law," by Frederick F. Shuey.
130 "The Hand in the Dark," by Chas. F. Oursler.
131 "The Trail of a Rogue," by George Bronson-Howard.
132 "The Woman from Nowhere," by Jack Bechdolt
133 "The Time Detective," by Frank Blighton.
134 "The Whispering-Room," by Frederick C. Davis.
135 "One Clue Missing," by Chas. F. Oursler.
136 "The Doom of the Damned," by Joe Burke.
137 "The Consuming Death," by Gilbert Hammond.
138 "Mrs. Deane's Jewels," by Beatrice S. Luisi.
139 "The Brass Voice," by Jack Bechdolt.
140 "For Shame," by Wm. Hamilton Osborne.
141 "The Triple Cross," by Hamilton Craigie.
142 "Blood Rubies," by J. Werner Phelps.
143 "I'll Win! I'll Win!" by Arthur B. Reeve and Margaret W. Reeve.
144 "Phantom Fingers," by George Bronson-Howard.
145 "On the Yellows," by Frank Blighton.
146 "The Argentine Ruby," by Beulah and Shirley Poynter.
147 "The Barrington Arms Case," by Jack Bechdolt.
148 "Hounded," by Frank Blighton.
149 "Direct Action," by Dr. Harry Enton.
150 "The Footprints On the Ceiling," by Chas. Fulton Oursler.
151 "The One Chance," by Thomas Ripley.
152 "Weapons of Hate," by Eric Howard.
153 "In Reserve," by Frank Blighton.
154 "The House on the Rocks," by Jack Bechdolt.

**If you cannot procure any of the numbers you want from your newsdealer, send us the price, ten cents, in money or postage stamps, and we will mail them to you postage free.**

**The price of the following numbers is 15 cents:**

155 "Laughing Death's Trail," by Nels Leroy Jorgensen.
156 "The Medicine Dropper," by G. P. Wilson.
157 "A Question of Kick," by Eugene Jones.
158 "The Mystery at Roaring Waters," by Harry Adler.
159 "The River Pirates," by Hamilton Craigie.
160 "The Shadow of a Noose," by Jack Bechdolt.
161 "At 2 A. M.," by Beulah Poynter.
162 "The Intriguers," by Grover Kidwell.
163 "The Lock and Key," by Hamilton Craigie.
164 "The Talking Dog," by Frank Blighton.
165 "The Heart on the Mirror," by Alexander Morrison.
166 "Mixed Motives," by Eric Howard.
167 "Southwest of the Law," by Hamilton Craigie.
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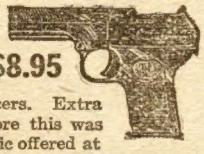

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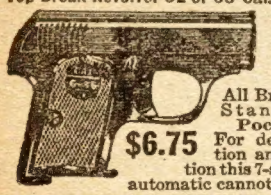

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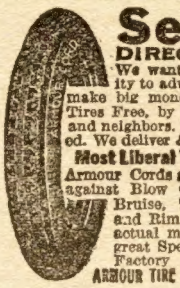

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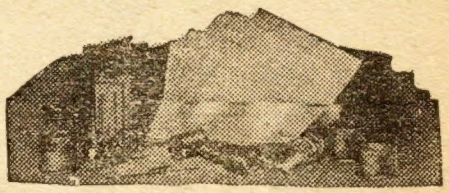

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